John Edelman (Ed.)

Sense and Reality

Essays out of Swansea

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Preface

The idea for this collection of essays arose out of conversations I had with D. Z. Phillips in Claremont in 2000: a set of philosophical essays recognizing and arising out of something I took to be both interesting and good going on at University College, Swansea, roughly from the 1950s into the 1990s. I envisioned eight essays, each in some way taking up the work of one of eight individuals – Rush Rhees, Peter Winch, R. F. Holland, J. R. Jones, H. O. Mounce, D. Z. Phillips, İlham Dilman, and R. W. Beardsmore – each of whom taught at Swansea for a substantial period during those years, these being followed by a ninth essay providing something of an overview of the other eight essays and thereby of philosophy at Swansea during the same period.

When writing to the individuals I hoped would contribute to the collection I tried to convey what sort of essays I was looking for by observing that it would be 'inconsistent with what seemed to me best at Swansea' if the essays were to focus much at all on the personalities or individual 'achievements' of the philosophers whose work was to be under discussion. The point, I went on to say, was the work itself and a discussion of it that was carried on in the same critical and, in Simone Weil's sense of the term, 'impersonal' manner that I took to be part of the strength of philosophy at Swansea, at least as I knew it.

It is for others to judge the worth of the project as an idea and the success of the essays here collected. But I should like to express my gratitude to each of the contributors, who in very different ways show in their essays a consistent appreciation of the character or, perhaps, the spirit in which philosophy was, if not always or everywhere, at least largely and consistently for several decades, pursued at Swansea. At the same time I should like to note my sense of gratitude to the individuals, both living and deceased, who are the subjects of these essays, for it seems to me that each played a significant role in creating and maintaining that quality or spirit of philosophical inquiry that I identify with the Swansea of those years.

Given the subject or subjects of the collection, a word should perhaps be said about the expression ‘Swansea School’. As Dewi Phillips noted on many occasions, this was not a term given to themselves by Swansea’s philosophers, and there is a good deal in these essays, I think, that should make evident the inappropriateness of the expression. On the other hand, as Mario von der Ruhr’s essay makes clear, there was something to be found at Swansea in those years that might rightly prompt the use of some such term. Indeed, it appears to me, as I believe it might to others who experienced philosophical *discussion* at Swansea – especially in the weekly meetings of the Philosophical Society founded by Rush Rhees in the 1940s and carried on into the 1990s – that what was distinctive and, I should say, quite remarkable, about that experience cannot be identified with the presence or participation of one or two individuals but belonged in some sense to the place, that is, to the department, though by no means to all of it. What indeed was distinctive I have not, after nearly thirty years as a ‘professional’ philosopher, found elsewhere; but it may at moments be evident to some in the essays that follow.

Finally, I am grateful to my colleague, Heidi Northwood, for her help with the preparation and the proofreading of the text.

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March, 2009

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Chapter 1

Rush Rhees: The Reality of Discourse

DAVID COCKBURN

1. Of the work published in his lifetime, the most widely known, and influential, of Rush Rhees's writings are the papers 'Can there be a private language?' and 'Wittgenstein's Builders'. These appeared initially in the 1950s in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* and were later reprinted in his collection *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (1970). One other collection of writings, *Without Answers* (1969), was published during his lifetime. Since his death seven volumes of his writings have appeared under the editorship of D. Z. Phillips: *On Religion and Philosophy* (1997), *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* (1998), *Moral Questions* (1998), *Discussions of Simone Weil* (1998), *Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty'* (2003), *In Dialogue with the Greeks Volume I: The Presocratics and Reality* (2004), and *In Dialogue with the Greeks Volume II: Plato and Dialectic* (2004). This essay will concentrate on the second of these volumes, which is an extended development of the themes of the two *Aristotelian Society* papers. In the final section I will say a little about the place that his concern with *discourse* has within his general understanding of the character of philosophy.

2. Rhees writes: 'Philosophy is concerned with the intelligibility of language, or the possibility of understanding. And in that way it is concerned with the possibility of discourse'.[1] It is, I think, important to be clear what Rhees does *not* mean by this. His suggestion is *not* that philosophy is concerned with 'the conditions of the possibility of discourse'.[2] We are tempted to think that one of the aims of philosophy is to investigate something – the nature of language perhaps – on which our speaking with each other depends. Many philosophers have seen their central task in that way; and many – perhaps including Rhees – have taken this to be one of Wittgenstein's concerns. Rhees's opposition to this view of philosophy is seen in remarks such as the following: 'The language – what you understand when you understand the language – is not something apart from understanding people and speaking with them. Something which makes that possible' (*WPD,* p. 277). Sharing a language with another is not what makes

discussion between us possible. Sharing a language with another is nothing other than being able to speak with her.[3]

Wittgenstein's 'rule following considerations' are often read as an exploration of a condition on which the possibility of discourse depends; and it is, perhaps, difficult to see how to avoid reading some of the remarks in which that discussion culminates in this way. For example: 'If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements'.[4] Whether there is a reading of this remark such that it says something true, Rhees would, I think, insist that there are readings on which it contains a serious confusion. The confusion lies in the suggestion that an 'agreement in judgement' is a condition on which the possibility of speaking with each other depends. This point deserves some development.

'You cannot say that it is because they have a common life that they are able to engage in conversation' (*WPD,* p. 155). You cannot say this, I take it, because their 'common life' is not something independent of the fact that they are able to engage in conversation.[5] And we face the same problem if it is suggested that the agreement in judgement, or in our use of words – the agreement, for example, in our use of the words 'pain', 'chair' or 'blasphemy' – is a condition of our being able to speak to each other with understanding. For if we take seriously the idea that in speaking of an individual's *use* of a word we are speaking of particular utterances, in particular contexts, into which it enters we will not suppose that we can characterize *my* use of a word independently of the ways in which the word enters into my linguistic exchanges with others. I respond to your 'Can we move him now?' with 'He's still in dreadful pain'; to your 'Where is he going to sit?' with 'There are more chairs next door'; and so on. A characterization of me as using a certain word in a particular way will make reference to my conversations with others into which the word enters. To speak of how I use the word 'pain' you must speak of the fact that I respond in certain ways – such as the above – to particular questions that others ask me; that I tell you that there is someone next door in pain who needs help; that I enter into discussions about whether the pain in my foot is more severe than the one in yours, or about whether a third person's pain in the elbow is really a cause for serious concern; and so on. We must not, then, picture each of us, individually, using our words as we do, and then, as a result of a harmony in these uses, being able to talk together.[6]

I said that we are tempted to think that one of the aims of philosophy is to investigate something – the nature of language perhaps – on which our speaking with each other depends. Wittgenstein is, I take it, struggling to free us of this temptation when he writes: ‘We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm’.[7] We might articulate Wittgenstein’s point by saying that what we are concerned with in philosophy is the ways in which we *use* words: not something that lies behind and guides that use. And we might take his analogy between words and tools to be a helpful way to bring that point home. This may go with the idea – it has for many – that the task of philosophy is to characterize, to provide a perspicuous representation of, our use of different words; and perhaps, in doing that, to highlight differences in the uses of particular words whose similarities up to a certain point have misled us.

Rhees expresses serious reservations about the analogy between words and tools; and, connected with that, reservations about talk of our ‘using’ words or language.[8] His reservations focus on the idea of ‘function’: a tendency he finds in Wittgenstein to suppose that the place of a word in our lives is helpfully thought of in terms of some end that it serves. While one might have doubts about how fair it is to read Wittgenstein as supposing that the analogy should be developed in *this* direction – how far his talk of the ‘use’ of a word should be read through the idea of ‘function’ – there is room for a suspicion that the analogy plays a crucial, and dangerous, role in ways in which we may be tempted to take his talk of ‘use’. We might express the point like this. Ways in which we may think of the ‘use’ of a word – especially to the extent that our thinking is guided by the analogy with tools – may encourage us to think of a crucial shift in our conception of the task of philosophy as being of this form: we are to move from the idea that our task is to investigate a structure *behind* our lives with words to the idea that our task is to investigate a structure *in* our lives with words. I will try to indicate why I speak of this as a ‘danger’.

Suppose that we think of a description of the ‘use’ of a word as being something of the form of a general statement of the particular assertions into which that word enters – or, as we might say, *can* enter – in particular circumstances. If we are picturing matters in this way we should, I think, find ourselves at this point very unclear about what is to be included in 'use'. The unclarity may have a variety of dimensions. One is this. We should be unclear about *which* features of particular utterances of a word are to be counted as aspects of 'use' in the sense relevant to meaning. For one thing, there may, I take it, be all kinds of pattern in my, or our, utterances of a particular word that are unambiguously quite irrelevant to the word's meaning. The interesting cases, however, are those in which we have differences that seem to be of a *form* that are relevant to questions about the meaning of our words. Imagine, for example, that, in some contrast with you, it is extremely difficult to bring me to acknowledge that a tramp[9] is, or may be, in serious pain: difficult, let us suppose, because it is difficult to bring me to let the tramp into my attention or conversation at all. With this, we can imagine that to the extent that I am, in a particular case, brought to agree that, as I express it, 'This man [this tramp] is in serious pain' I do not weigh his pain as you do as a reason for action or feeling: I do not, that is, respond to him as you do, and I do not offer or accept 'He is in serious pain' as a reason, say, for helping him as you do; I would, for example, find ridiculous your suggestion that we miss our dinner appointment in order to help him. Now I take it that it is to be expected that minor differences of roughly this form should be a pervasive feature of our lives: differences, in the case of sensations and emotions, in how we 'read' another's facial and other expressions, and differences in how we weigh their feelings as reasons for attending to them in particular ways. In these examples we have, in *some*, not wholly irrelevant sense, differences in the use of the word 'pain'. Are we to say, on that account, that these people mean something different – if only very slightly – by the word 'pain'?

I suspect that Wittgenstein's analogy between words and tools may stand in the way of our feeling the force, or recognizing the significance, of these questions. People do all kinds of things with hammers: besides bashing in nails, they use them as paperweights, to prop open windows, and so on. This does not, however, threaten the sense of talk of the 'use' of a hammer. The reason it does not is that hammers are produced by human beings with the aim that they should serve a certain end. It is this that dictates which hammer wielding performances, and which aspects of them, are features of a hammer's 'use'. Now the word 'red', or 'untidy', is not, in any remotely analogous way, a human product defined in terms of the end that it serves. To the extent that that is so (and there will be disputes, disputes that are central to Rhees's concerns, about how far it *is* so), one should lose one's sense that the analogy with the use of a tool may illuminate the sense in which there is a structure in our use of a word that it is the task of philosophy to describe. There is, perhaps, much less of a structure in our life with words than the analogy with tools might lead us to suppose.

I will jump here to a summary statement of a conclusion that is, perhaps, suggested, though hardly established, by what I have just said. A philosopher who wishes to describe our 'use' of a particular word, if he is not engaged in the chimerical task of saying everything that might be said about every occasion on which that word has been uttered, will be involved in making distinctions between what is significant in our use of the word and what is not[10]; and, what is not quite the same, between those variations in 'use' with which we can live comfortably and those of which this is not so. The making of such distinctions will involve judgement – nothing in what there is to be observed in our use of the word will dictate how they are to be made – and will sometimes be such that we cannot assume automatic agreement from all who will attend clearly to the facts. In making such distinctions, the philosopher will commit himself to claims about how the word *is* to be used.

I asked: Are we to say, on account of the differences in our use of the word 'pain', that people mean something different – if only very slightly – by the word? We may be tempted to reply that the answer is obviously 'No' on grounds of the following form: the fact that we *would* run into difficulties were we talking about a tramp is clearly quite irrelevant to our discussion now about John; and so clearly provides no basis for the suggestion that we mean something different when we speak of John's 'pain'. If, however, we defend a negative answer in *that* way it is quite unclear what can be left of the connection, which we thought we had learned from Wittgenstein, between meaning and use; for was not the crucial point – or at least *a* crucial point – the idea that what I am doing now in saying something only has the character that it does in virtue of what others say on other occasions?

Are we to say, on account of the differences in our use of the word 'pain', that people mean something different – if only very slightly – by the word? I suspect that that is, at this point, an unhelpful question. In any case, I want, for a moment, to forget about 'meaning',[11] and to focus simply on 'use'; focus, that is, on the question: what is the relevance of what is said on other occasions to our characterization of what I am doing now as *saying* something – and as saying this particular thing?

3. ‘Philosophy is concerned with what you learn when you learn the language, or when you learn to speak’ (*WPD*, p. 276). Philosophy is an attempt to get clear, not about a condition on which discourse depends, but about *what* you learn when you learn to speak: what it is that makes it correct to say that these people are *speaking*. The attempt to get clear about this is, Rhees suggests, closely linked with a concern about scepticism – a scepticism that Rhees takes to be central to philosophy – about whether, in learning to speak, we learn *anything*: a scepticism about, as Rhees expresses it, ‘the reality of discourse’, or, as he also puts it, about ‘Whether it makes any difference what you say – whether there is any point in it anyway; whether there is any point in saying anything anyway’ (*WPD*, p. 277).

How are we to picture this sceptical concern: the concern about ‘the reality of discourse’? If, in one way or another, we think of language as a tool, it may be very unclear what this could come to. There is little, if any, room for that concern in cases in which the words function, more or less, as simply tools in a practical venture.[12] There are contexts in which we might say: so long as the results are achieved – for example, I get my cup of coffee – there is no further question about whether there has been successful communication between the waitress and myself. But much discussion is not like that.[13] When in conversation with another, one may, in particular cases, wonder whether one is really in contact with them at all: whether the words that are passing back and forth really amount to a genuine discussion, or whether it is all just words. I sense, perhaps, that while the moves that each of us makes in the conversation seem fine on the surface, nothing is really going on; or I worry that your understanding of what I am saying (and mine of what you are saying) may be quite different from what the other takes it to be.

This kind of worry may lead me, in my more philosophical moments, to think of meaning and understanding as processes that lie beneath the surface of our words; and so may, in *that* way, be a seed from which a general scepticism about meaning may grow. But we can be concerned about ‘the reality of discourse’ – or, at least, about the reality of this particular discussion – without being in the grip of such images. The concern, we might say, is a concern about how, if at all, what we are saying now fits into your life: ‘What did you learn from the dialogue or conversation you have just had? Has it made any difference to the way you understand things? Do you see things at all differently? Or was the whole conversation just one more thing to add to the disconnected jumble?' (*WPD*, p. 29). Will her endorsement of what I have just said – for example, of my words 'John is not really to blame for what has happened' – be reflected in her life in ways that I take for granted? Will it, for example, be reflected in her attitude towards, and treatment of, John? The connections, or lack of them, between what is going on here, in this conversation, and what goes on at other points in our lives include, centrally, connections with what happens in other conversations. Just as she is, in some measure, not really engaged in conversation with me if her immediate response to what I say indicates a failure to take in, or see fully the force of, what I have said, so 'the whole conversation [was] just one more thing to add to the disconnected jumble' of our lives if, for example, having endorsed my words she goes on, in later conversations, to speak as if the earlier discussion had never taken place. The thought that this was a real discussion goes with my counting on her standing by what she said, resting on what she said then in my interpretation of something she says later, appealing to our agreement on *that* point in defending my proposal that we must revise things on which we reached agreement in an earlier conversation, and so on.

The sense that I am really talking with another – that we are, in our words, really in contact with each other – involves a sense of the difference that what each of us says makes in our lives: a sense that will (other things being equal) be undermined if, in practice, the other goes on to speak as if this conversation had never taken place. The sense that I am in contact with another in this conversation is a sense of an indefinite range of possible developments in our relations with each other. It matters to me – in a way that is not easy to articulate – that she would not simply look bemused if I did (which I do not plan to) take the discussion in this direction, or that. This expectation (if that is the right word) is, we might say, an aspect of the 'attitude towards a soul' of which Wittgenstein speaks. The point here is of the same form as the fact that taking our exchange of smiles to have been a genuine contact between us involves a sense of an indefinite range of ways in which things might go between us. Smiles are only what they are because of the particular ways in which they are characteristically embedded in our lives. And, in a particular case, her smile wasn't what I thought it was if it turns to a sneer as soon as my back is turned, or if she does not even recognize me when we next meet.

4. ‘Philosophical puzzlement: unless this does – or may – threaten the possibility of understanding altogether, then it is not the sort of thing that has worried philosophers’ (*WPD*, p. 34). The scepticism that Rhees suggests is central to philosophy – perhaps which defines a concern as *philosophical* in character – is one that calls in question

> the possibility of *learning* anything in that sense – the possibility of understanding people. The possibility of saying anything. . . . Whether it makes any difference what you say – whether there is any point in it anyway; whether there is any point in saying anything anyway’ (*WPD*, p. 277).

I have spoken of a way in which a doubt of this kind might arise in relation to a particular conversation. But how should we understand the enormous importance that Rhees attaches to the generalized version of such a doubt?

In rejecting the imagery that pictures meaning and understanding as processes that ‘lie beneath the surface of our words’, and, with that, in acknowledging the sense in which the future developments themselves may be what matters to us when we are concerned whether another has really understood what was said, we might suppose that the philosophically crucial form of scepticism – the scepticism of which Rhees speaks – is a scepticism about the future: when we recognize the commitments for the future that are involved in our taking ourselves to understand each other, we will, or perhaps ‘should’, feel a concern as to whether we have adequate grounds for supposing that our expectations will be fulfilled: just as I may, in a particular case, have such doubts when I sense that another is not genuinely engaged in a conversation.

It is, perhaps, in some such way as this that some have suggested that Wittgenstein shows us that language – the possibility of discourse – has a much more fragile basis than we might have supposed. I believe, however, that once we disentangle a number of different strands in that thought, we will realize that there is nothing left to it. The ‘rails running to infinity’ of which Wittgenstein is supposed to have disabused us were not ones that we *could* not fall off; they were ones that if we *did* fall off we would no longer be speaking.[14] With that, once we are clear of any confusions that may arise there, we should acknowledge that my confidence that discussion with you will not fall to pieces is no more fragile in its base than is my confidence that I will continue to be able to make sense of your facial expressions, and to interact with you through these and other gestures. And, in the light of what has been said so far, any general scepticism that rears its head here will, it seems, be simply an application of the scepticism about induction that Hume brought so clearly into focus.

Well, I am uncertain here. I am not sure if we should say that Wittgenstein has brought to our attention a sense in which our attempts to speak with others could fall into chaos at any moment: a sense in which come tomorrow we could find that, for example, our attempts to speak about the colors of things founders hopelessly in the face of our utterly discordant judgements. However that may be, I doubt whether *that* is what Rhees has in mind when he speaks of something that may 'threaten the possibility of understanding altogether'. To appreciate the form of scepticism of which Rhees speaks we will do better, I suspect, to reflect on the way in which we sometimes know that a particular conversation *will* almost certainly founder very rapidly if we push it in certain directions. It might, for example, be clear to me (it often has) that a particular discussion, on a topic with a religious dimension, would fall into a hopeless sense of failure to make contact if it drifted just a little further in the direction, say, of 'eternal life' or 'the power of prayer'. To the extent that this is so the claim that we are in real dialogue – that there is genuine contact between us in the discussion that is actually taking place – is, to some degree, compromised. My sense of what is happening between us now cannot be divorced from my recognition of the severe limits on how things could go between us in this area.

That example has a number of distinctive features. I have (I am supposing) a fairly clear picture of the limits to our possible discussion, those limits lie very close to our actual discussion in the sense that movement in that direction may be almost inevitable if it is not self-consciously curtailed, and an awareness of these limits is, perhaps, almost bound to have significant bearing on my sense of the contact that I have with you in the discussion that we are having. We can, however, be sure that in many (I would assume all) discussions there are limits of forms that are analogous, though lacking these distinctive features. I was speaking of one case of such limits when I noted the sense in which there are almost certainly differences between us – between myself and others with whom I regularly converse – in the 'use' of the word 'pain': differences, for example, in the details of how we might 'weigh' the pain of another as a reason for helping her, or of the circumstances in which we would judge another to be in pain. I earlier refused to answer my question: Are we to say on account of *these* differences in use that you and I mean something different by the word, and so mean something different when, in a particular context, we say 'John is in pain'? While I am not at all sure that, asked in the abstract, the question has an answer, most, I guess, will be very reluctant to say that difficulties that we might run into when it comes to tramps imply that we mean something different when we speak of John's pain. For all that, we will have failed to acknowledge the importance of words in our lives if we fail to recognize the sense in which those differences *do* bear on our conversation about John. This, I think, is something that Rhees is stressing when he writes:

> So what they say here is connected with other things that they say, and it is connected with other things that other people say (I think that is important anyway). And that this *discussion* is connected with other things that other people say, and in that kind of way belongs to a language. (*WPD*, p. 159)

What connects the discussion that, let us suppose, we later have about a tramp with our current discussion about John – connects them in a way such that we can say that the same word, 'pain', features in both of them – is the way in which what is said in the one conversation might have significance for what is said in the other. For example: the way in which you might place my very marginal regard for the tramp's pain beside the deep concern that I felt to be clearly in order in relation to the sufferings of my friend. And the fact, if it is a fact, that I acknowledge this to be an appropriate taking up of my earlier words about John is one of the things you may expect from me to the extent that you took me to be speaking seriously when I said of John, 'He's in pain; we must help him'. In this sense, the fact that our discussion would fall apart – that we would be unable to agree at the most basic level – if it turned to a tramp, *does* have a bearing on our conversation about John. It has a bearing of the same form – though, no doubt, of lesser degree – as do the limitations in the possible lines of development in my discussion with the religious believer. The contact that I have with Mary in our discussion of John's pain is, in some measure, compromised by the fact that there is this limitation in the direction in which it could be developed.

In appreciating the form of the connection between 'meaning' and 'use', we appreciate that – even in those cases in which we would never, in the normal course of things, say that we do not attach the same meanings to the words we use – we must *expect* to run into difficulties in our conversations with others: to find ourselves at points at which our words do not quite meet each other. Realism would, I think, suggest that something of this form is happening all the time, and that we generally skirt round it. We are momentarily baffled, perhaps, about how she could say what she is now saying in view of what she said yesterday. Perhaps a little pressing would reveal a mutual misunderstanding that might readily be resolved; but we do not pause to find out, or if we do, and fail to locate the misunderstanding, other pressures move us rapidly beyond the sticking point.

How much should we be concerned about the fact that there will be such points of breakdown: of mutual incomprehension? How much should we be concerned about the fact that, or the possibility that, if the discussion moved in this direction it would fall apart? Scepticism, as Rhees understands this, is, perhaps, in part a deep awareness and concern about these possibilities: a sense that, if the attempt to take up my words in this or that direction is inevitably going to founder at some point, it makes no difference what I say; as we might also express this: a sense that if it should turn out that you and I cannot agree about the color of bluebells we do not *really* mean the same by the word 'blue' – are not really making contact when we talk together about the wonderful blue of the sky today; scepticism is a doubt as to 'whether there is any point in saying anything anyway'. To which we might feel like replying that a scepticism of that form would be an exaggerated response to what are generally marginal – in the sense of having little significance – possibilities. But if we do not recognize that such scepticism is an exaggerated response to *something* – that it is taking, perhaps to an unreasonable extreme, something that is fundamental to our sense of the contact that we make with others in conversation – then we have failed to recognize language as anything other than a functional device for achieving, through others, our own independent ends.

5. The idea that a central task of philosophy is to characterize our 'use' of particular words is closely linked with the idea that reflection on the distinction between sense and nonsense is central to philosophy. The reflection takes the form of trying to draw the distinction in particular cases; and also, at another level, it takes the form of trying to characterize the distinction that we are drawing. Wittgenstein is warning of dangers that lie in certain ways of thinking of the distinction when he writes: 'When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from

circulation'.[15] One might, however, be concerned that it is a rash man who would suggest of any form of words that it be 'excluded from the language'. The rashness lies, at least in part, in the fact that such a suggestion will always invite those with a taste for a certain kind of inventiveness to construct a context in which this form of words would transparently be in place. The moral is: It is not the *sentence* – 'I can never feel another's pain', 'Jones travelled back in time', 'Mary found herself in someone else's body', 'I know that this is a hand', and so on – that is senseless; but, rather, the thing that someone has said on a particular occasion.

Just as we may think of the meaning of a word as something that lies behind its use – as something that allows its employment in certain combinations with other words, but excludes it from others – we may think of understanding what someone has just said as identifying the meaning that lies behind the words: a meaning that dictates how what he said might be appropriately developed. But understanding what someone has said just *is* knowing how it is to be taken; and to show that what he said was senseless is to bring to light an illusion he was under concerning the directions in which his words may be taken up and developed in conversation. For example, when, in philosophy, someone says 'I can never feel another's pain', we may suspect that the words – as uttered here – go with a picture of a line of development that would run into the sand if consistently pursued.

It might be added that in a huge amount of what we say there is serious unclarity about *how* it is to be taken. There is no straightforward answer to the question: would this – or this – be a taking up of her words in a direction consonant with her meaning? Is the sense of talk of 'life after death' on *her* lips such that 'psychical experiences' might appropriately be thought of as providing evidential support for the claim that there *is* life after death? There may be no straightforward answer to this question. (Suppose, for example, that while she can be tempted down that path she would never have found herself on it without the influence of this powerful speaker.) In so far as there is no answer to this question there is an unclarity in what she is saying. With that, we may often be in a position in which we have to say: in so far as his words are to be taken up in *this* way they run rapidly into the sand; but in so far as they are to be taken up in *this* way they do not.

The clarity that we strive for in paradigmatically *philosophical* contexts (for example: in relation to 'the privacy of sensations') is of exactly the same form as, and is often continuous with, a clarity that we strive for in other contexts: indeed, we might say that striving for such clarity is fundamental to *speaking*. And, to the extent that we suspect that a failure of such clarity is a pervasive feature of our lives, we see here, perhaps, another dimension of the scepticism of which Rhees speaks: a scepticism about 'whether there is any point in saying anything anyway'.

6. Many philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein have thought of their task as centrally involving, on the one hand, the characterization of our 'use' of particular words, and, on the other, a disentangling of sense and nonsense. We might say that these are both responses to scepticism as Rhees understands this in that they are attempts to show that it *does* make a difference what you say: that there *is* a point in saying anything. But if we express the matter in this way we must acknowledge that 'showing' that this is so cannot, at this point, be sharply separated from the attempt to *make* it so. Thus, the attempt to reveal that a sense that we thought we saw in a certain way of speaking was no sense can hardly be separated from the attempt to disentangle the hopeless lines of development of our words from ones that may lead somewhere. This goes with (though a bit more work is needed to show just *how* it goes with) my earlier suggestion that characterizing the 'use' of a particular word, in the sense in which the philosopher may attempt to do this, involves judgement in that it involves making distinctions between what is significant in our use of the word and what is not.[16] In making such distinctions, the philosopher will, as I expressed it, commit himself to claims about how the word *is* to be used.[17]

Whether or not we speak of the search for sense in what we say, and the search for ways of speaking that will extend the possibilities of discussion between human beings, as parts of the task of '*philosophy*' is, I think, of little importance. For all that, precedent may indicate that there is a strong case for saying that it is: for the attempt to respond to a scepticism about 'whether there is any point in saying anything anyway' is certainly closely related to the familiar philosophical search for ways of speaking of the world that would be accessible to, as they say, *any* rational being; or, in a different imagery, the search for 'a description of the world as it is in itself'.

The philosophical search for ‘a description of the world as it is in itself’ has, in practice, sometimes taken the form of an attempt to identify ways of thinking and speaking that must be shared by *any* being whom we could recognize as thinking or speaking at all. It is argued, for example, that identifying shapes roughly as we do is an inescapable feature of thought, as identifying colors roughly as we do is not; and, with that, that a scepticism about whether there are material bodies possessing shape is not a genuine option. The phrase ‘a description of the world as it is in itself’ may, however, acquire some of its mesmerizing power from another set of connotations: connotations that are more closely linked with our everyday attempts to determine the truth about some matter.

The kind of breakdown that occurs when you and I cannot agree on the color of a distant building, on whether what someone said was rude, or on whether someone is in pain or angry, may be contrasted with more radical forms of breakdown in which, as we may be tempted to put it, what is at issue is not ‘the facts’ but ‘the way in which the facts are to be characterized’.[18] The difference is sometimes marked in terms of a distinction between cases in which, on the one hand, two people who, sharing their ‘concepts’, disagree about the facts, and, on the other, ones in which two people employ different concepts in their descriptions of the world. Again, the difference may be characterized in terms of a contrast between, on the one hand, ‘particular judgements that we make’, and, on the other, ‘the standards that we employ in making judgements’. These ways of speaking of ‘different concepts’ or ‘differences in standards’ are characteristically part of a package of measures to resist an empiricist imagery that models all clarity of thought on good eyesight: that views the procedure for the resolution of all differences between people on the model of stepping closer to the thing about which we differ, or procuring a more powerful microscope. We may seek to reject such imagery through a denial that ‘the world’ provides a common measure to which we can appeal in an attempt to resolve fundamental differences in ways of speaking and living. And Wittgenstein is warning us against the imagery when he insists that what ‘lies at the bottom of the language game’ is not a kind of seeing, and that ‘What has to be accepted, the given, is . . . *forms of life*’.[19] But if ‘the bottom of the language game’ is the point at which the possibility of rational persuasion gives out, we can note that we have been given no grounds for supposing that there is, inevitably, such a point. From the fact that peering more closely is not going to advance our attempts to resolve the difference between us it does not follow that *nothing* could do so. And speaking in terms of our operating with different ‘concepts’ or different ‘standards for judging’ is, I think, likely only to obscure the possibilities. For we may then feel ourselves confronted with a choice between, on the one hand, picturing our ‘concepts’ or ‘standards’ as things that might be compared with the world in a way akin to that in which a color sample might be compared with a particular scrap of material, and, on the other, picturing what separates us from others who think very differently from us over certain areas as a non-negotiable ‘given’.

If you want to convince me (who, on careful inspection, have no doubt that they are best described as ‘purple’) that bluebells are blue you are likely to speak, not about the ‘standards with which I operate here’ (for I don’t operate with any standards), but about bluebells and their likeness to other, unambiguously blue things; and (in certain respects) similarly if you want to convince someone that a great ape may grieve for the loss of its child or suffer from debilitating boredom, to convince Wittgenstein that constant interruption of another is ‘rude’ even within the context of philosophical discussion, or to convince a more radical sceptic about rudeness that some actions are correctly described in these terms. Say, if you want, that in these cases we operate with different ‘concepts’: it may help to remind us that the difference between us is not to be resolved by stepping closer to that about which we do not agree (the bluebells, for example). But to say that it is not to be resolved in *that* way is not to say that it is not to be resolved at all; nor that a resolution must involve discussion of us (our ‘concepts’) as opposed to discussion of bluebells or great apes.

7. Rhees would, I suspect, say that the forms of scepticism that have had a central place in philosophy – scepticism about the external world or about the past, for example – are best viewed as forms of, or, perhaps, displacements of, a scepticism about the reality of discourse. The suggestion may gain credibility through reflection on, for example, the way in which Descartes grounds the demand to answer scepticism in his observation of the breakdowns in agreement in the most basic features of our understanding. We might, however, add that the ‘scepticism’ to which Rhees gives central place may provide a more perspicuous view of the character of the issues. It is more perspicuous in that it highlights a sense in which philosophical discussion is essentially *personal* – by contrast with a familiar – Cartesian

– idea that the understanding that we seek in philosophy is radically *impersonal.*

‘It is important to insist on the way in which philosophical problems are personal – just as scepticism is’ (*WPD*, p. 39). In its concern with language, philosophy is concerned with relations between people. But Rhees is, I take it, suggesting something further: that the form of that concern is essentially personal – in a sense, I take it, in which, for example, physics is not. The notion of the ‘personal’ here has, perhaps, two dimensions. First, it is important that, in philosophy, I speak for myself – I take responsibility for my words – in a sense that, or a degree to which, that is not so in physics. Or, perhaps better: being fully in my words calls on more dimensions of myself than does being fully in my words in physics. And second, it is important that in philosophy I have a strong sense of those to whom my words are addressed; and, with that, a strong sense of the particularity of the conversational context: a strong sense of what is to be said at just *this* point given whom I am talking with and where we have reached in our discussion. Those two points are connected in (very roughly) this way: taking my words as I mean them will, in philosophy, call on aspects of the other that can less readily be taken for granted than is the case in physics.[20]

The attempt to enhance ‘the reality of discourse’ – to deepen the links between us that are involved in conversation – is, I take it, unambiguously ‘personal’ in the above sense. An attempt to bridge the kinds of gap between another and myself that I have mentioned – a gap, for example, over the intelligibility of speaking of ‘grief’, ‘boredom’ or ‘pain’ in relation to a particular species of animal – is likely to call on widely ramifying aspects of each of us; and, with that, has little chance of success if it is not highly sensitive to the particular conversational context. In being clear about the *kind* of issue with which one is dealing here one is clear that we should not expect to find a form of reasoning that will have a grip with *anyone*, no matter where they may now stand. And provided one does not suppose (as, of course, many philosophers have) that only what is impersonal in that sense is correctly described as ‘*reasoning*’, one will not think it follows that the clarity we are striving for here is not a clarity about fish, great apes, or whatever it may be. Further, if we wish to articulate this as an attempt to characterize ‘the world as it is in itself’, there need, perhaps, be nothing wrong with that way of expressing the matter. No doubt there *is* generally something wrong with that way of expressing the matter. The idea that the aim of philosophy is to characterize 'the world as it is in itself' generally comes with a good deal of baggage: it may come with an imagery that suggests that success is inevitable so long as both parties have good eyesight, a capacity for logic, and sufficient patience and good will; or an imagery that suggests that our attempt is only serious in so far as we disengage from everything 'personal' in us – everything that we might lose without losing our 'rationality'. But, as I have tried to indicate, there are dangers that we may throw out some of the traditional aspirations of philosophy with the bathwater of the baggage.

8. Rhees's views on language lie at the heart of his philosophy – in more ways than one. The centrality that he gives to *conversation* in his discussions of language is reflected in the place that philosophy seems to have occupied in his own life, and, in particular, in the character of the writings that he produced. As Lars Hertzberg has remarked:

> Rhees was engaging in dialogue, not debate; a distinction he clarifies in one of his notes: 'what we call debating . . . is a matter of trying to make an impression on somebody else than the person *with* whom, or *against* whom, you are talking – it is not even clear *to* what person you are talking, so that a debate in this way is not a conversation in one sense at all'. Whereas academic writing tends to have the character of debate, it is clear that what counted for Rhees was conversation in the full sense, an exchange in which there was no doubt about who you were talking *to*.[21]

Rhees's reluctance to publish (or lack of interest in publishing), along with the fact that much of his writing was in the form of notes to individual friends or colleagues, is, I take it, at least in part a reflection of his sense of the importance for *saying* something of a particular conversational context. Philosophy is no exception to this general principal. Indeed, it may represent a particularly clear instance of it. One's sense of what needs to be said in philosophy, and the sense of what one says, cannot be divorced from the fact that one is addressing someone who is stuck at a particular point, or is in the grip of a particular confusion, or who is puzzled in the same way as oneself, and so on. To the extent that publication involves *no* sense of those to whom one's words are addressed, its character as language is, one might say, compromised. Now in practice, I take it, a philosopher who publishes a book or article always has *some* idea of a community to whom his words are addressed. But the sense that one sometimes has in reading philosophy that enormously important questions are being discussed in terms that nobody could possibly take seriously may be connected with unclarities about just who it is that is being addressed.

Rhees's views on language also lie at the heart of his philosophy in the sense that whether he is writing about science, religion, morality, mathematics or art a central concern – perhaps *the* central concern – is to draw attention to the particular character of the discourse with which we are dealing. Much of our confusion in philosophy, Rhees thinks, reflects our mixing up of different forms of discourse. That thought is, of course, a familiar one; but it takes on a quite distinctive form in Rhees's hands. In a letter to Peter Winch, written in 1954, Rhees writes:

> It seems to me that your chief difficulty is regarding the language of religion and its connexion with religious life. You still seem to want to think of the language of religion as though it were in some way comparable with the language in which one describes matters of fact; and of religious practices as though they were in some way comparable, perhaps, with the practices of physical culture.[22]

In another letter he writes:

> When you raise the question 'What are moral statements like?', you seem to be asking what *other* statements they are like – how we ought to class them: Are we describing or ejaculating? – and this seems to me the wrong way to begin. It seems to assume that they must be a special case of some other class of statement. Whereas I want to say, 'Never mind that. When and where do you find them? Under what circumstances do you know you have to do with moral statements? And what sort of questions, what sort of problems, what sort of worries and what sort of answers do they call forth?'[23]

It may be helpful to place these passages beside another extract from the letter to Winch quoted above:

> I would emphasize that there could not be religion and there could not be love of man and woman unless there were language anyhow; unless, I mean, people used language in their lives – or, to put it the other way round, unless they lived the kind of lives that people live with language.[24]

I quote this passage in part to draw attention to a crucial contrast with the familiar philosophical concern with the question of whether there can be *thought* – or a particular kind of thought – without language. In Rhees's hands questions about the connection between language and 'thought' are transformed into question about the connection between language and particular aspects of our *lives*: not ‘thought about God’, but religion – that is to say, religious *life*. But I quote the above passage also in order to highlight something else that is, I think, fundamental to Rhees’s understanding of these issues – to highlight this by *contrast* with the way in which he articulates his point in that passage. Later in the same letter Rhees writes:

> The language does not bring about the ‘difference’ of being in love, but the language is a part of that difference – I had almost said ‘*is* that difference’, because the language is not the words on paper nor even the reciting of them, the language is the way it is used and the role it plays, the language is all it means to him in using it and to her in listening.[25]

The language *is* the difference – or, at least, part of it. It is not a *condition of* there being love in a life: not, in that sense, something without which there *could not* be love of man and woman. Without the language of love there *would not* be love of man and woman.[26] Our difficulty in holding on to that distinction – or, perhaps, in thinking it a distinction of any importance – reflects, or is an aspect of, our failure fully to acknowledge that to speak of a language is to speak of words as they feature in our lives. We do not have here two things – love and its language, or religion and its language – between which there are connections for the philosopher to investigate. As Rhees writes elsewhere: ‘We learn to live in somewhat the way in which we learn to speak, and we learn to live . . . *in* learning to speak’.[27]

NOTES

[1] *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 32. (Hereafter *WPD.*)

[2] Not that Rhees rules out an investigation that could be described in this way. He notes, rather, that ‘it may be very ambiguous to speak about the conditions on which the possibility of understanding depends’ (*WPD*, p. 34). One form of investigation that a number of philosophers, including some strongly influenced by Wittgenstein, have found highly suspect involves, as it is sometimes put, employing our concepts to characterize certain features of nature on which our possessing those very concepts depends. Whether or not such an investigation would be of philosophical interest, there are, so far as I can see, no grounds for supposing that it would involve an objectionable

circularity. I cannot pursue the question of exactly how this form of investigation relates to that which Rhees does exclude. I mention it simply in order to warn against the possible conflation of different issues.

[3] Is it not clear that I share a language with people with whom I am not in discussion; and that it is the fact that we share a language that makes possible my speaking with them? We must, of course, take Rhees in a way that acknowledges the sense in those claims; and doing so would require a little more care than I have taken with his remark here.

[4] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: 1953), #242.

[5] And so I think Rhees would have significant reservations about, for example, the following remark from one of İlham Dilman's last books: 'Those concepts belong to the language we speak and that language is rooted in our life and culture' (*Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution* (Basingstoke, 2002) p. 167).

[6] Wittgenstein's analogy with continuing an arithmetical series – an activity that is essentially solitary in a sense in which a conversation is not – is, perhaps, one of the ways in which Rhees suspects that Wittgenstein's thinking is distorted by his 'idea of a close parallel between mathematics and language' (*WPD,* p. 204).

[7] *Philosophical Investigations*, #108.

[8] It is, I find, helpful here to compare the idea of characterizing the 'use' of a word with that of characterizing the 'use' of a smile.

[9] I am indebted to Olli Lagerspetz for bringing to my attention the importance of thinking about this kind of example.

[10] Alternatively, he may – as some do – think of himself as characterizing some core, which is grasped by everyone who understands the word, and from which all other aspects of its use flow.

[11] Partly because I am not at all sure that this notion, which plays quite local and specific roles in our normal thought, is well suited to the philosophical work to which it is often put.

[12] That, I take it, is a central feature of Rhees's doubt about whether Wittgenstein's builders, as they are presented to us, are *speaking* at all.

[13] Some might want to add that none *should* be.

[14] Though that remark may betray a failure fully to acknowledge the power of the philosophical imagery.

[15] *Philosophical Investigations*, # 500.

[16] Consider, for example, the woman who, in her talk of life after death, is occasionally drawn into speculations about psychical research; even though it is clear, or seems so to us, that such speculations are quite discordant with the main thrust of that way of speaking in her life.

[17] To express the point in terms employed by Stephen Mulhall in a discussion of Stanley Cavell, a characterization of use is an attempt to elicit the agreement of others;

it is an aspect of the 'search for community' (*Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary,* 11, 43).

[18] Though we should, surely, be at least slightly embarrassed if we find ourselves putting it this way.

[19] *On Certainty* (Oxford, 1969), #204; *Philosophical Investigations,* p. 226.

[20] Though this point needs considerably more careful handling than I have given it here. The contemporary astronomer, for example, is writing for a group that does not include people who suppose that the Earth is flat and the stars are set in a dome that arches over it. If he wanted to address such people he would have to speak in very different terms: would have to if he wants his words to be something other than one more thing to add to the disconnected jumble. (Somewhat as most popular expositions of the latest developments in astro-physics are just one more thing to add to the disconnected jumble.)

[21] Lars Hertzberg, 'Rush Rhees on Philosophy and Religious Discourse', *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001), pp. 431-442. The Rhees quotation is from *WPD*, p. 202.

[22] Rush Rhees, *On Religion and Philosophy*, p. 39.

[23] *Without Answers* (London, 1969) p. 104.

[24] Ibid., p. 40.

[25] Ibid., p. 43.

[26] This is a point with which, I think, Wittgenstein struggled. The struggle is seen in the following 'exchange' in *Zettel*: '"If humans were not in general agreed about the colors of things, if undetermined cases were not exceptional, then our concept of color could not exist." No: – our concept *would* not exist.' (#351). It is seen too in the backsliding of the following, much quoted, passage from *Philosophical Investigations*: 'If language is to be a means of communication there *must* be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments' (#242; my italics).

[27] The sentence reads in full: 'We learn to live in somewhat the way in which we learn to speak, and we learn to live *as* we can learn to speak (or: *in* learning to speak.)', *On Religion and Philosophy* p. 187. I am not clear what to make of the 'can'.

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Chapter 2

Peter Winch: Philosophy as the Art of Disagreement

LARS HERTZBERG

> If I light an electric torch at night out of doors I don't judge its power by looking at the bulb, but by seeing how many objects it lights up.
> The brightness of a source of light is appreciated by the illumination it projects upon non-luminous objects.
>
> Simone Weil[1]

> Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.
>
> Robert Bresson[2]

Peter Winch's[3] work spans most of the main areas of philosophy. His early work dealt with the philosophy of the social sciences and with the problem of understanding alien cultures. Later on he returned to these issues on only a handful of occasions. Winch's later work concerned itself, most prominently, with moral and political philosophy, but also with the philosophy of mind and language, epistemology, and the philosophy of religion. One of his most widely noted essays of later years is one in which he discusses the intelligibility of the suggestion that an object might simply cease to exist.[4] At the time of his death, he was at work on a monograph on political authority.[5]

Most of Winch's work can be seen as an engagement with the philosophy of Wittgenstein. Among other things, he edited a collection of essays, called *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*[6], presaging what came to be an influential approach to the *Tractatus*, in emphasizing the continuity of Wittgenstein's thought. On the death of Rush Rhees, Winch succeeded him as one of Wittgenstein's literary executors. But Winch also wrote essays on classical philosophers like Spinoza, Hobbes, Rousseau and Kierkegaard, as well as a book on Simone Weil[7] (he planned, but never got around to writing, a book on Plato).

While Winch made original contributions on a number of questions, it may well turn out that his most lasting contribution will be to moral philosophy.

I would not hesitate to consider Winch the most important writer on moral problems in the English language since World War II, although it can be argued that his work in moral philosophy has not to date reached its full impact.

Two pervasive issues

For all the variety of themes addressed by Winch, his work is characterized by a marked unity of perspective. One way of articulating this unity is suggested by the words he uses to describe philosophy, in the introduction to *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*[8], 'as an enquiry into the nature of man's knowledge of reality and into the difference which the possibility of such knowledge makes to human life'.

In grappling with the question of the nature of our knowledge and its role in our lives, we may feel that there are two interconnected problems that press for a solution. On the one hand, seeing that individuals and societies may have ways of thinking about reality that diverge widely from our own, how are we still able to regard those other ways of thinking as forms of *thought*? And on the other hand, in the judgements people make, how are we to separate the contribution made by reality itself from that made by the judger; in other words, how do we tell the objective apart form the subjective? According to Winch, our thinking about these issues tends to be distorted by misconceptions. Throughout his work, he was concerned with drawing attention to the different ways these misconceptions made themselves felt in connection with a variety of philosophical problems.

Consider the way in which the first of these questions arises. To regard something as a *form of thought* is evidently to consider it as embodying a concern with the truth (using the word in an inclusive sense). For us to be able to recognize it as such, however, it should be sensitive to the sorts of consideration that in our judgement are relevant to the matter at hand. But if it diverges from our own ways of reasoning about things, that means that it will appear to be lacking in that sensitivity. How then is the idea that some alien form of thought is deeply misguided or out of touch with the reality in question compatible with our considering it a form of *thought* concerning that reality? Or, turning the question around, how are we to reconcile the recognition that other forms of thought are possible with the trust we have in the authority of our own thinking?

In Western philosophy, the standard response to this problem has been to mark a more or less clear-cut contrast between two ways in which our thought may engage with reality. On the one hand, there is objective thought which is concerned with truth, is amenable to rational argument, and tends gradually to converge into a unified conception of reality. For instance, it is thought that the methods of natural science will guarantee that the conceptions we form of the phenomena of nature are as fully responsive to the nature of those phenomena, and as independent of our perspective, as they can possibly be. On the other hand, there is subjective thought with respect to which the possibility for variation is unlimited, and in the case of which we have no ultimate recourse in the face of disagreement. Matters of aesthetic appraisal have been considered prime instances of this. Whether we find some object aesthetically appealing or not, for instance, is wholly determined by who we are. There is no issue concerning which of the two responses is truer to the nature of the object.

The exact terms in which this division has been conceived have varied. It has been thought of as a distinction between factual judgements and value judgements, or between theory and practice; Karl Popper has spoken about it in terms of a dualism of facts and decisions; Charles Stevenson in terms of a dichotomy of beliefs and attitudes.[9]

Now, if some such clear-cut dichotomy is accepted, the problem of divergent forms of thought seems to disappear. In the case of thinking of the first kind, the problem has a straightforward answer, in the case of the second, there *is* no problem: issues such as aesthetic merit are not, strictly speaking, objects of thought.

Winch’s concern, however, is to reorient our understanding of these dichotomies. The problem of divergent thought is dissolved, though not by dividing it in two but by rejecting its presuppositions. The reason for rejecting them, I would propose, can be presented as follows (these are not Winch’s exact words but they are, I hope, true to his intentions[10]). To regard someone as making a judgement (e.g., ‘It’s too cold to go fishing’, or ‘This door needs more paint’, or ‘That wall must be medieval’) is to respond to her words as expressing a certain kind of engagement with a situation. What kind of engagement we take her to be expressing depends on our understanding of her and of the situation. Each of these illuminates the other: thus, how we see her engagement will in part be a reflection of how *we* understand the situation; and again, what features of the situation we take to be relevant for her depends in part on how we understand her engagement with it.[11] These considerations form the context in which her words will be taken in one way or another.

To ask what *contributions* the different elements of the situation make to her confidence in the judgement she is making is to suppose that the judgement has an identity independently of those elements, as if the form of words could be assessed for their validity regardless of who uttered them, in what context and for what purpose. However, once an utterance is considered apart from its context of human activity, it is reduced to an exercise in sentence construction; it will then no longer be something the truth of which could be an intelligible object of concern.

We can see then that the phrase 'concern with the truth' does not identify a specific type of human striving, but rather indicates a general form that various types of human endeavour may have in common. We might say that what it *means* to have 'knowledge of reality' is *constituted by* the difference it makes whether we know a thing or not. This difference, however, varies with the context of life and the object in question.

This is not to deny that we do distinguish between the subjective and the objective, and that appeals to the distinction have an important part to play in our disagreements. Thus, in the course of a discussion, I may argue that what you say is merely a reflection of your particular perspective on things, or then again I may admit that your appraisal of the problem under discussion is realistic. In doing so I am expressing my disagreement or agreement with you *as part of* the discussion we are engaged in, and the grounds I might give are dependent on the particular issue at hand. My claim is not one that is to be given an *a priori* grounding. Philosophy cannot resolve what is objective and what is not.

In emphasizing our practical engagement with the objects of our thought, Winch places himself in the tradition deriving from Wittgenstein, in which it is a central notion that thought and its expression in action are inseparable. Of course, the critique of the idea that human knowledge is formed through the passive reception of sense impressions had a long history in Western philosophy before Wittgenstein. The deepest and most fundamental criticism of it had been formulated by Immanuel Kant. However, Kant's criticism was deepened in the later work of Wittgenstein, in which the traditional view of the relation between thought and action is reversed, or rather, dissolved.[12] Wittgenstein argued that the relation between our thoughts and their objects is mediated by our actions; or better, my actions are constitutive of what I think and mean.

The identity of a form of thought, then, is bound up with its role in a human life. Accordingly, I may come to see an affinity between an alien way of thinking and one with which I am familiar because I see them as embodying a similar concern, even where the methods of inquiry differ. This means that commonalities of meaning may show themselves in the ways we disagree as much as in the ways we agree. Actually, the relation between different forms of thought is indeterminate: where we draw the line at which the distance becomes too great even for disagreement to be meaningful will be an expression of our own relation to the dispute.[13]

In what follows, I shall present some of the ways in which the issues I have outlined here get expressed in Winch's work.

Understanding society

In writing about Winch it is not possible to bypass the early fame he attained with his book *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (1958)[14]. The book appeared when Winch was 32. It came to have a huge success, was translated into ten languages, and for a time Winch's name became a household word not just among philosophers, but even more so among social scientists. The book brought a higher level of sophistication to the debate about the social sciences; however, it may have clouded out some of Winch's more mature work.

In *The Idea of a Social Science,* Winch was concerned to show how our conception of the study of social phenomena is distorted by its being modelled too closely on the natural sciences. Whereas a physicist learns her profession by mastering the activities and concepts of the scientific community she is joining, the sociologist, political scientist or economist, he argued, will need to grasp the activities and concepts of the social group whose life she is studying as well. In saying that a society, say, practices ritual slaughter or polygamy, or has a monetary system, or something we can call art, what one is claiming is that these descriptions are compatible with (do justice to) the way members of that society understand their own practices. We cannot resolve which of their practices belong together, or what counts as doing 'the same thing', without taking account of the cultural context in which those activities occur. Winch has sometimes been understood to be arguing that the social scientist has to accept the terms in which the participants express their activities at face value. But this was not his point. Rather, whatever description the social scientist may put forward, that description, unlike the physicist's description of physical phenomena, will inevitably stand in some sort of logical relation to the self-understanding of the participants: it may, to a greater or lesser extent, agree with it or be in tension with it. When the latter is the case, the social scientist's ability to sustain her reading would depend on her ability to show that the participants' understanding of the activity in question is deficient or illusory in some way; this, in turn, requires showing that their presentation of it is in conflict with other aspects of their self-understanding. In other words, it is only by being responsive to questions concerning the consistency of her account with what the natives take themselves to be doing that she can uphold the claim to be saying something about *their* life.[15]

This realization becomes particularly important when we are up against the concepts with which people in alien cultures or living in other periods of history articulate their concerns. In such an investigation, comparisons based on superficial resemblances can be misleading if one ignores the conceptual context in which the action is embedded.

The Idea of a Social Science was followed six years later by the essay 'Understanding a Primitive Society', in which Winch questioned certain prevalent ideas about the relation between a scientific world view and the outlook of an African tribe relying on oracles and witchcraft. A central point of his essay was that the difference could not be brushed off simply by maintaining that the African Azande were blind to the workings of the world or that they were deficient in their powers of reasoning. On the contrary, we may assume them to be just as astute in applying their powers of judgement as Westerners are. It is just that the framework in which their judgements are made is different from ours. If this led the Azande to be wrong in many of their ideas, and there is nothing to prevent our saying that they were, this does not entail that they must have been generally deficient in their capacity for thought. As we might put it: they got things wrong simply because they happened to be on the wrong track.

The wide acclaim that greeted *The Idea of a Social Science* and 'Understanding a Primitive Society' was connected with the way these texts seemed to mesh with the spirit of the times. Many readers welcomed the *Weltanschauung* they thought they found expressed in them; Winch, it appeared, was exposing the universalist pretensions of Western science and rationality – while others, of course, criticized Winch as an advocate of cultural relativism and hence as a traitor to the scientific world view, a treason that was found particularly heinous since it originated in the very bosom of analytical philosophy.[16]

These reactions were hardly what Winch had envisioned. It was not so much that they were at odds with his aims, as that his discussion moved on an entirely different level of philosophical engagement. Nothing could have been further from his conception of philosophy than the idea that the philosopher should take up the cudgels for one side or the other in the ideological controversies of his times. He was trying to make a logical point, not to advocate a choice of method, least of all an ideologically motivated choice. He made this explicit in responding to a critic of his work: 'I was not advocating any particular procedure ("First grasp the concepts and then apply these to the actions"), but saying something about the character of certain sorts of investigation …'[17] He also wrote:

> Perhaps it would be clearer to say that I was investigating the concept of the social: that is, trying to bring out some of those features of a state of affairs that we have in mind when we call it a social state of affairs. . . . [W]hen we have determined what will and will not count as an explanation of a certain kind of phenomenon, we still have the task of finding the best methods for producing examples of what will so count.[18]

Still, though Winch is not taking sides here in favor of this or that group of social scientists, his discussion nevertheless had a salutary effect on the conduct of inquiry by removing certain prejudices, thus for instance freeing social scientists from their imagined obligation to emulate the natural scientists (or rather, to emulate their own idea of what natural scientists are doing).

In outlining the aims of his book, Winch criticized Locke's conception of the philosopher as underlaborer, as someone whose task it was to clear the path for the advance of science. This notion suggests that the philosopher is on top of things, that he has a grasp of the logical structure of various concepts and is in a position to help others get straight about them. But as Rhees had emphasized, the confusions the philosopher is trying to disentangle are not confusions that happen to arise concerning this or that particular expression but bewilderment about language as such, about what speaking is and about what it is for expressions to mean what they mean. And this is a bewilderment that we all share, the philosopher no less than the scientist or the layman.

In the introductory chapter, Winch had written, 'the day when philosophy becomes a popular subject is the day for the philosopher to consider where he took the wrong turning' (p. 2). He was anticipating that his criticism of the extra-scientific pretensions of science would be unpopular. Given that the outcome was rather the opposite of this, one might wonder whether he asked himself whether *he* had taken a wrong turning somewhere. In fact, we find an answer of sorts in Winch's preface to the second edition of his book, written after a time lapse of more than 30 years. Here, he details both some of the things he thinks should have been expressed differently, and what he considers a shortcoming of his central argument: the fact that, in comparing social relations to an exchange of ideas, he had given too idyllic a picture of what an exchange of ideas may be like. Commenting on his own suggestion that 'social interaction can more profitably be compared to the exchange of ideas in a conversation than to the interaction of forces in a physical system', he wrote:

> The trouble is . . . that I was too single-mindedly concerned with the negative side of the claim, with the result that I never seriously followed up my own suggestion to look at the comparison between social life and the exchange of ideas in a conversation.
>
> Had I done so, I might have been struck by the *fragility* of the ethico-cultural conditions which make such an exchange of ideas possible. . . . This does not just constitute a gap in the argument, but results in serious distortions. . . . To take the comparison seriously would be to ask such questions as: what role in such an interchange of ideas is played by strategies of deceit, blackmail, emo-

> tional bullying, punches on the nose, etc. . . . The nature of the contrast [between human relations ruled by ideas of justice and those governed by force] is important to the subjects discussed in the book; but the book itself, unfortunately, has nothing to say about them.[19]

In this connection, Winch refers to Simone Weil as a writer who 'has done more than anyone to reveal the depth of such issues'. Clearly, however, he did not think that this oversight impugned the central line of argument in the book.

One problematic feature of *The Idea* (as of much of Winch's work) is its deceptive simplicity; one needs to read the text over a number of times in order to realize precisely what is and, even more, what is *not* being said. But whatever the problems of interpretation and whatever the occasional shortcomings, the role of the book in changing the course of debate in the philosophy of the social sciences cannot be questioned.

Undermining the dichotomy

Much of Winch's work could perhaps be summarized by saying that he was consistently seeking to undermine the subject-object dichotomy by drawing attention to *possibilities* of variation in the 'theoretical' realm, and to the *limits* of variation in the 'practical' realm. Thus, *The Idea of a Social Science* and 'Understanding a Primitive Society' served to draw into question the idea of inevitable convergence on the factual side: the world in which we live, he made clear, does not impose any logical constraints on the language we may use.

This dual line of attack is made explicit in the essay 'Nature and Convention' from 1960[20]. Karl Popper had claimed that justice – as distinct from our knowledge of physical reality – 'is conventional in all its branches', since 'all norms of human behaviour are akin to decisions'. Against this, Winch pointed out, on the one hand, that our understanding of physical nature is subject to change just like many of our norms of conduct, and, on the other hand, that certain aspects of morality cannot be understood to be conventional, but rather are presupposed by any possible conventions. More specifically, his argument is that we could not coherently conceive of a society in which speaking the truth were not a norm.

In a critical commentary, however, R. F. Holland argued that this line of thought – what he called 'the life-form argument' – could only take us so far: it could not account for what might be called the *inwardness* with which an individual may experience the demand for truth, and which could make her hazard all her prospects for its sake. In response Winch admitted that he had been wrong in supposing that his argument 'was sufficient to establish that truthfulness must be regarded as a *moral virtue* in any possible human society'. All the same, he pointed out that there are important conceptual connections between what an individual can consider significant and the institutions of the society in which he lives.[21]

Winch once mentioned in conversation that he thought this essay constituted an important advance in his thinking, and regretted the absence of this perspective from *The Idea of a Social Science*. I assume that he was thinking about the constitutive role of a conception of morality for our understanding of a human society. This theme was given a different emphasis in the conclusion of the essay 'Understanding a Primitive Society'. Counterbalancing its theme of cultural variation, there is a passage in which Winch attempts to indicate some of the limits to cultural relativity. He writes:

> . . . the very conception of human life involves certain fundamental notions – which I shall call 'limiting notions' – which have an obvious ethical dimension, and which indeed in a sense determine the 'ethical space' within which the possibilities of good and evil in human life can be exercised. The notions . . . correspond very closely to those which Vico made the foundation of his idea of natural law, on which he thought the possibility of understanding human history rested: birth, death, sexual relations. Their significance here is that they are inescapably involved in the life of *all known human societies* in a way which gives us a clue where to look, if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of institutions. The specific forms which these concepts take, the particular institutions in which they are expressed, vary very considerably from one society to another; but their central position within a society is and *must be* a constant factor. In trying to understand the life of an alien society, then, it will be of the utmost importance to be clear about the way these institutions enter into it. . . .
>
> I speak of a 'limit' here because these notions, along no doubt with others, give shape to *what we understand by 'human life'*; and because a concern with questions posed in terms of them seems to me constitutive of what we understand by the 'morality' of a society. In saying this, I am of course disagreeing with those moral philosophers who have made attitudes of approval and disapproval, or

> something similar, fundamental in ethics, and who have held that the *objects* of such attitudes were conceptually irrelevant to the conception of morality.[22]

Some critics have found this passage puzzling. It seems as if Winch were, after all, laying down certain limits *a priori* to the forms human society might possibly take, as well as recommending certain procedures of investigation based on those limits, thus going against his own previous claims. On this reading, what he is saying is that in all collectives formed by members of the species *homo sapiens*, the facts of birth, copulation and death will of necessity be matters of central concern.

To be sure, the passage is somewhat problematic, and an apriorist reading undoubtedly seems close at hand (consider, e.g., the use of 'must be'). However, granting that Winch may have expressed himself carelessly here, there are ways of reading his remarks that would not put them at odds with his general outlook. For one thing, he can be understood to be drawing attention to the fact that, even though there are indeed no *a priori* limits to cultural variation, there is *no known group* of *homo sapiens* for which Vico's triad does not play a part. In light of this contingent circumstance, the fact that we usually do, in practice, succeed in reaching some measure of understanding across cultural divides should not be considered surprising. Then again (as is suggested by what follows), he is drawing attention to a limit to what we would be prepared to consider a *human life* or a *morality*. He is, in other words, asking us to consider to what extent we could relate to a society in which birth, copulation and death are not held to be crucial events, as a *human* society in the first place, in view of the huge differences in relations between individuals, in attitudes toward one's own life, etc., that such an absence would entail. (Winch may not have been clear that there were these different readings.)[23]

On such a view, the relation between Vico's triad and the concept of a human society would be internal rather than external. Here the use of the word 'human' is conditioned by the depth of the relation we can enter into with the other. Winch returns to this theme in the essay 'Who is my Neighbor?', written years later, where he considers the case of the man-shaped Yahoos and the horse-like Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The point of the example, as I read it, is to bring out the deep challenge involved in trying to imagine a world in which creatures with equine bodies are more 'human' than creatures with human bodies.[24]

At the same time, Winch is criticizing the idea that morality can be understood as entirely constituted by its form, i.e., that we could recognize something as an attitude of 'moral' approval or disapproval regardless of the kind of object at which it is directed. Thus, he is pointing out that it would be confused to *call* a concern with just anything, such as the length people wear their hair, a 'moral concern', no matter how passionately it was felt; or better perhaps, that it would require quite peculiar circumstances for such a description of it to be intelligible.

The significance of my actions

In the two essays we have been discussing, Winch's concern was with the constitutive role of moral perspectives for human society.[25] However, while he was writing them his thinking about moral philosophy was undergoing another change of focus, as he points out in the introduction to *Ethics and Action*. He turned to questions concerning 'the kind of moral significance a man can attach to his own acts, as distinct from the significance to him of other men's acts' (p. 6). Thus he had already been moving in the direction called for by Holland in the critique mentioned above. Perhaps the most distinctive expression of this change of focus is found in the essay 'Moral Integrity'.[26]

The central point of the essay is brought out in a discussion of Leo Tolstoy's story 'Father Sergius', an account of the spiritual odyssey of Sergius from a man of the world to a monk and hermit. Sergius achieves fame as a holy man, but under the admiration of the pious his spirituality gradually erodes and turns into a mere pose. Sergius's career reaches its moral low point when he succumbs to an erotic temptation, but he finally manages to regain his peace of mind by fleeing into the anonymous life of a beggar monk. Winch describes the exteriorization of his moral perspective in the following terms:

> If one looks at a certain style of life and asks what there is in it which makes it worth while, one will find nothing there. One may indeed describe it in terms which bring out 'what one sees in it', but the use of these terms already presupposes that one does see it from a perspective from which it matters. The words will fall flat on the ears of someone who does not occupy such a perspective even though he is struggling to attain it. If one tries to find in the object of contemplation that which makes it admirable, what one will in fact see is the admi-

> ration and applause that surround it. So one will see oneself perhaps as a prospective object of such admiration. 'What was internal becomes external.'[27]

According to Winch, what most traditional accounts of morality have missed is precisely the internality of the moral demand. He discusses the predominant conceptions in moral philosophy, pointing out the way in which they disregard this aspect or misrepresent it. The reason most moral philosophers fail to recognize this, Winch argues, is that they share a confused idea of action. On this view, acting means initiating a change in the world. In order to initiate a change, the agent must be presented with reasons for acting. One such set of reasons is moral reasons. Moral reasoning is meant to help us overcome the moral difficulties inherent in a situation. However, at this point the whole business is beginning to seem paradoxical:

> Morality, we are told, is a guide which helps [an agent] round his difficulty. But were it not for morality, there would be no difficulty! This is a strange sort of guide, which first puts obstacles in our path and then shows the way round them. Would it not be far simpler and more rational to be shot of the thing altogether?[28]

Plato's Glaucon thinks he has an answer to this question (in Book II of *The Republic*): morality is actually useful; it is a kind of social lubricant, instituted for the smoother running of human affairs. If you ignore the moral conventions of your time and place, you are probably headed for trouble sooner or later. So in *ordinary* circumstances honesty is the best long-term policy. The problem, however, is that it is not hard to imagine *extra*-ordinary circumstances in which your own interests might be better served by a reckless disregard for your fellow man. Glaucon, in short, is perfect grist for Holland's mill. As soon as we ask, 'What advantage does morality bring?', we are looking outside morality for something to recommend it; but then morality is no longer valued for its own sake, but rather its value is made out to be dependent on its relation to that other thing.

John Stuart Mill tried to overcome this limitation by stipulating the common good as the goal of morality independently of the agent's self-interest. But this leaves us without an answer to the question what will move the agent to act morally. In fact, Mill is getting the worst of both worlds: he makes the value of morality contingent on external goals and yet loses the idea of something that could motivate the agent to respect its demands.

Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, sees the need for an account of morality that does not render its value dependent on something external. His solution lies in arguing that the only morally valuable form of action is one that is performed *for the sake of* morality. Hence for a father to play with his child out of a sense of duty would have moral worth, while doing so because he enjoys it would not. But this is surely getting things upside down. On the contrary, if a father is unable to enjoy playing with his child, he would probably regard this as a shortcoming on his part, even if he still does so out of duty. This does not mean that a morality of respect for the moral law is simply to be replaced by a morality of spontaneity: one would of course often go wrong in giving way to one's spontaneous impulses. The example is not used in support of some general claim about morality (that would just mean falling into the opposite trap from Kant); it simply reminds us of the nature of a father-child relationship, thus bringing across the point that there is no distinctive mark of 'the moral' that can be identified independently of the case at hand. (Obviously, there are cases in which enjoying doing the right thing would be a form of corruption – say, the case of a father who finds pleasure in telling his child he has been grounded every time he has done some reckless thing.)

At the same time, in another respect, the Kantian conception lets in too much, by neglecting the distinction between *acting from a sense of duty* and *making it one's goal to be dutiful*, thus failing to acknowledge that for a person's motives to be pure they must be free of any consideration of his or her own moral perfection. We find an influential contemporary instance of the failure to make this distinction in Charles Taylor's account of moral motivation. Taylor attempts to ground the notion of moral responsibility in a distinction between what he calls weak and strong evaluation, i.e., between simply acting from some motive I have and acting from a motive *because I consider it worthy*.[29] His account seems to be an instance of what Winch is criticizing: clearly, having worthy motives is not a matter of *judging* one's motives to be worthy.

Making explicit a point that seems to be implicit in Winch's argument, something has already been lost when we pose the issue of moral motivation in terms of conflicting interests. Suppose that, in attending to your needs, I tell myself that doing so involves a sacrifice of my own interests in favor of yours (and thus, that my action gives me a claim on your gratitude). Thus I see myself as having had a choice between being selfish and unselfish. Morality is then reduced to a competing consideration (as it was for Sergius). This does not mean, of course, that helping the other under such circumstances would have no worth, but simply that this perspective does not offer us a vantage point from which the nature of pure generosity can be understood. True generosity means that the question of interests is held in abeyance.[30]

The quality of a person's motives does not lie only in what she puts into words; the meaning of what she says is made manifest in the way she lives. We do not become what we are through being persuaded by reasons; rather what will come to constitute reasons for us is ultimately an expression of who we are. Though argument may play a part in moral disagreements, it will not do so by showing us that, like it or not, we are committed to a certain stance because of certain principles we have already accepted. Rather, if it is effective, it is so by making us see the issue in a different light. Winch quotes Jean-Paul Sartre in this connection:

> . . . Sartre said, perhaps with exaggeration but still with point, that when I come to deliberate – to consider reasons for or against doing something – *'les jeux sont faits'* ('the chips are down').[31]

And he goes on to say:

> Let me express this point by saying that a situation, the issues which it raises and the kind of reason which is appropriate to a discussion of those issues, involve a certain perspective. If I had to say shortly how I take the agent in the situation to be related to the perspective I should say, as I think would Sartre, that the agent *is* his perspective. I should not follow Sartre much further here. I think he is led badly astray by his failure to see clearly that the *possibility* of there being a certain perspective on a situation cannot be led back to any agent's choice.[32]

The shortcoming of conventional accounts of morality (including that of Sartre) is, I think, connected with the idea of a 'moral conviction' and its relation to action. Philosophers talk as if people had various moral convictions, which means that they *project* certain values or principles, a 'moral theory', onto a world which is, 'in and of itself', morally neutral. (The theory may consist in a scale of values by which alternative ways of acting are to be compared to one another, or of a set of prescriptions declaring certain types of action to be obligatory, permitted or prohibited.) This notion renders the very notion of a moral perspective incomprehensible, since it entails that, however one judges a situation, it might have been judged differently. This means that ultimately any judgement becomes gratuitous.[33]

Reasons and reason

In this connection, we may be led astray by a flawed understanding of the distinction between reasons and causes. A simplified account of this distinction might run as follows: in acting on the basis of reasons, one's actions can be justified through an appeal to considerations that are similarly available, as the saying goes, 'to all rational agents'. In as far as a person's behavior is produced by causes, on the other hand, it is dependent on the situation in which the behavior occurs and on the kind of influence to which the agent happens to be open. In the former case, we can understand the action by getting into the thinking of the agent; in the latter case, it cannot be made intelligible but is to be explained by an appeal to laws of human behavior that have to be empirically tested.

On this view, the only room for disagreement concerning the rationality of a course of action is one which is due to a discrepancy between the information available to different agents. This account, however, ignores the extent to which what a person may come to see as a reason, or the force that a certain kind of reason will carry with her, is an expression of who she is. How we see the world is shaped in part by our individual backgrounds and temperaments, as well as by the ways of thought and feeling we share with those around us. The intertwinement of subject and object, individual and collective, is brought out in the following passage in the essay 'Human Nature':

> A child is born within . . . a particular human society. He learns to speak and to engage in various kinds of activity in relation to other people. In the course of these activities he encounters problems of extremely diverse kinds, problems which change in character as he matures, and problems that bring him into new kinds of relations with other people. Along with this development there comes a growth in his understanding of what constitute problems and difficulties for them. This growing understanding manifests itself in the way he comes to treat people in his daily life. . . . This growth in his understanding of other people through his dealings with them is at the same time a growth in his understanding of himself, which is in turn a development of the kind of person he is. The way a person develops in these dimensions will be influenced by the kinds of

> people, the kinds of situation and the kinds of problems which he finds himself confronted with in the course of his life. But of course it is also true that his growth will depend on what he himself brings to the situations he faces.[34]

This account, we might say, consists entirely of banalities. Its interest lies in showing how a listing of banalities is sufficient to explode the facile dichotomies (such as the 'nature-nurture' contrast) in terms of which we tend to think about human thought and behavior.

The sources of human motivation cannot be divided, once and for all, into those that involve an appeal to 'the human capacity for reasoning', and those that can only be explained by invoking psychology or neurology. The way a person applies the distinction between reasons and causes is itself a reflection of who *he* is. One man's reasons may be another man's causes: for instance, what is realism to me may be bitterness, or naïveté, to you. Who possesses the capacity for rational thought is not determined by God-given criteria: whether I shall agree to consider you rational will depend, in the end, on the reasons you accept. Of course, I will not demand (unless I am utterly unreasonable myself) that you must accept *my* reasons for me to count you as rational. But I should have to be able to share your perspective to the degree of being able to enter into argument with you. Disagreement is an attitude I can only have to positions that make sense to me.

In fact, as was said in the introduction, the very issue of whether two individuals can be said to share a perspective or not is to some extent indeterminate. Winch himself gives too simple a construal of this issue in 'Moral Integrity'. Having pointed out, in the passage quoted above, that the possibility of there being a perspective cannot be led back to an individual's choice, he continues: 'It depends rather on the language which is available, a language which is not any individual's invention.'[35] This formulation, if interpreted to mean that all those who speak the same language are in a position to share a perspective, sweeps under the rug the whole question of what it means for a language to *'be available'* to an individual. It is true that the language in which I express my concerns cannot be my invention, but the way I apply it is an expression of who I am. People who conduct their lives in a shared language may yet, as it were, inhabit different parts of it; and even when they use the same words, the *spirit* in which they use them may not be the same.

Elsewhere this indeterminacy, the room there is for divergence and disagreement within what we are inclined to think of as the realm of reason, becomes a central focus of Winch's attention. He recognized the risk that, in the effort to steer clear of the Scylla of subjectivism, we might succumb to the Charybdis of moral objectivism or realism. In the essay 'Particularity and Morals', he writes, discussing the issue what kinds of constraint the facts of a situation exert on moral judgement:

> Philosophers . . . have sometimes spoken of a 'moral reality' which exercises the requisite constraint on moral judgement. There is nothing wrong with the phrase as such and it has all kinds of perfectly good uses *within* moral discourse. But . . . used in the service of a general characterization of 'the relation of moral discourse to reality', it represents a lapse into mythology. We do not have much more here than a sort of metaphysical counterpart of the Tarskian formula about truth: something which is simply used to buttress the claim that there is indeed a logical constraint on moral judgement without providing an actual account of what that constraint is. . . . This whole way of thinking is an example of what Wittgenstein was attacking in what he wrote concerning the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. We take the Tarskian formula ['"p" is true if and only if s'] to give us the relation between the expression in quotation marks and the world. But of course all we have on the right-hand side of the formula are more words. . . . The sentence gets its relation to something other than words (what we are calling 'the world') only through its use, its application. . . . We make contact with the world only through the *application* of language.[36]

In the later essay 'Who is My Neighbour?'[37], Winch addresses the sort of divergence of understanding that is possible within a shared language. He asks what distinguishes the Samaritan who comes to the rescue of the man who had fallen among robbers from the priest and the Levite who pass the victim by (Luke, 10). Winch imagines the Samaritan telling himself, 'There's a human being in distress, I have to go to his rescue.' The point is that the priest and the Levite would not have denied the Samaritan's description if confronted with it; rather, they never came to consider it under that aspect. What distinguishes the Samaritan from the others cannot be captured in anything he might have said *about* the situation; rather, he sees something different *in* it. What mattered was the sensitivity with which they responded to this particular situation.[38]

But neither does this mean that what distinguished the three men was some such thing as a 'moral outlook'. In other words, there is no need to imagine the Samaritan's acting on a suppressed 'ethical premise', such as 'Always help human beings in distress'; one that, supposedly, the priest and the Levite happened not to share. In fact, if asked to respond to such a principle, say, in a questionnaire, the priest and the Levite might without hesitation have ticked the box *'Agree completely'*. The difference between them lay only in the fact that their response to the actual situation differed: 'Their attitude was the proof of their attitude' to paraphrase a remark of Wittgenstein's.

On Winch's view, the most direct expression in language of the difference in moral response between the Samaritan and the other two is in terms of moral necessity: the Samaritan recognized that there was something he *had* to do, whereas the priest and the Levite did not. This, again, picks up a theme from 'Moral Integrity': moral philosophy, Winch argued, has been handicapped by its preoccupation with concepts like right and wrong, duty and prohibition, etc., concepts that, as it were, express a generalized view of the demands of morality without embodying a commitment to any particular action. What characterizes the moral must, on the other hand, is that, unlike those other terms, it does not allow for the qualification 'in principle'.[39]

Philosophy and the individual

Now if one's view of good reasoning is partly dependent on the person one is, as has been argued here, does not this risk reducing philosophy to a matter of individual idiosyncracies? On a widely shared view, whatever is dependent on the individual can have no legitimate part to play in the discipline: philosophy is an inquiry into logical issues, and therefore considerations of individual psychology must be alien to it. But if this is to be anything more than a slogan, one should be able to show how it works out in particular cases.

It is sometimes said that we should follow the argument wherever it takes us, no matter who presents it or how it is presented. Ideally, philosophical reasoning should be put forward in the form of a deductive argument, the result of which is unambiguous and independent of who presents it. However, this misconstrues the sense in which philosophy is concerned with logic. Logical argument is not primarily a tool in philosophy (not even in the special branch of philosophy called logic); rather the aim of philosophical reflection is getting clear about the logical character of an issue. The part played in that enterprise by what by any stretch of the imagination could be construed as deductive argument is infinitesimal. Once we are able to agree on how some matter can be laid out in the form of a deductive argument (supposing that that is what we aim to do), the important issues must already have been settled: we must have reached an understanding of what the meaningful questions are, what distinctions need to be made, what types of objection are relevant and what are not, etc. The aim of philosophical discussion is a meeting of philosophical imaginations (whether such a meeting actually does occur is, of course, a matter of degree). Getting to that point is not so easy, as witness millennia of philosophical disagreement. Above all, there can be no mechanical procedure for getting there. In fact one result of the effort to reach a meeting of imaginations may be the agreement that such a meeting is unlikely ever to come about.[40]

What matters in this context are things like choice of examples, style of argument, the use of metaphor, etc., features that are in turn bound up with individual predilections and with the tradition in which one has been trained. This connects with the question in what sense we may learn from others in philosophy. According to another well-known slogan there can be no authorities in this discipline. This slogan is not much more helpful than the previous one. Many of us have learnt philosophy not by being given persuasive arguments but by being confronted with models of what it means to be seriously engaged with the issues. Without the example set by a powerful individual we may never learn to give some problem the attention that is required if we are to get clear about what it involves. One’s passion for the subject is never entirely free of passion for those who practise it.

Of course, the influence of another can take pernicious forms: we may be under the spell of some teacher in such a way that we will swallow things we would not accept from somebody else. But again, there is no neutral criterion for separating the healthy from the pernicious. The distinction between the logical and the psychological does not work as a tool, rather it enters the discussion as an ideal giving the disagreement a form: by acknowledging this ideal we show in what sense we still see ourselves as engaged in a common undertaking. In the particular case, we have no recourse but to argue the issues.

For better or worse, then, it is inevitable that individual temperaments will shape the course of philosophical debate. One might think here of the impact of the work of Wittgenstein on English-speaking philosophy, or, in turn, of the particular forms that that influence came to be given through the mediation of Rush Rhees and the other Swansea philosophers. I should like to end by saying something about the way I see the personality that Peter Winch brought to philosophy. It is not an uncommon failing among philosophers and people in general to take a self-centred view of our fellow human beings, in which they interest us only to the extent that they fulfil some ideal that we have established in advance (or, perhaps, to the extent that they can serve as examples of the failure to reach up to those ideals). It seems to me that much of Winch's life and his philosophy gave expression to the importance of resisting this temptation. He saw that one could only learn about the different forms that human goodness may take by being attentive to the particular forms of goodness manifested by particular individuals. This does not mean that he would necessarily 'find his feet' with everybody: Winch did not hide the distance he felt from certain manifestations of life in the culture surrounding him, including philosophy.[41] We are often tempted to legitimize our resentments: we feel that we cannot allow ourselves to distance ourselves from some human phenomenon unless we can prove to our own satisfaction that it is in some way contrary to reason or morality. Winch, it seems, had an uncommon ability to resist this temptation, thus he would not succumb to a simplified view of the relation between sympathy and agreement.[42] It need hardly be said that it is at least as difficult to resist the opposite temptation: telling ourselves we agree just because we are in sympathy with one another. That would mean overlooking one of the most important sources of philosophical insight: the kind of focused disagreement that is only possible where there is an underlying sympathy. Interchanges with Winch made one forcefully aware of this fact.[43]

NOTES

[1] *First and Last Notebooks* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 115-6. Quoted in Peter Winch, *Ethics and Action* (London, 1971), p. 222.

[2] *Notes on the Cinematographer* (London, 1975), p. 72. *(* '*Fait apparaître ce que sans toi ne serait peut-être vu.*' *Notes sur le cinématographe* (Paris, 1975).)

[3] Peter Winch was born in London on 14 January, 1926, and died in Champaign, Illinois, on 29 April, 1997. He was a student at Oxford in the late 1940s. His most important influence during that time was Gilbert Ryle. Wittgenstein was then still living in Cambridge, but Winch never met him. From 1951 to 1964 Winch taught at Swansea. It was during this period that he received his most formative impulses. The main source of these was Rush Rhees; Winch reported that a letter Rhees wrote to him in 1954 commenting on a talk he had given was crucial to the development of his philosophical outlook. (This letter has since been published as 'Religion and Language' in Rush Rhees, *Without Answers* (London, 1969); it is reprinted in D. Z. Phillips (ed.), *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1997).) Through Rhees Winch gained a closer acquaintance with Wittgenstein's work. Rhees also kindled Winch's interest in the thought of Simone Weil. Among Winch's contemporaries at Swansea were Cora Diamond, İlham Dilman and Roy Holland, while D. Z. Phillips was his best-known student. From Swansea, Winch moved first to Birkbeck College and then to King's College, University of London, and from there, in 1985, to the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign. For an overview of Winch's life and work, see Colin Lyas, *Peter Winch* (Teddington, 1999).

[4] See 'Ceasing to Exist', in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford, 1987). This collection will henceforth be referred to as *TMS*.

[5] It is not known at present how far he got with the manuscript. He was concerned with the theme throughout his career. For his more recent thoughts on it, see 'Certainty and Authority' in A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.), *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays* (Cambridge, 1991), and the posthumous 'How is Political Authority Possible?', *Philosophical Investigations* 25 (2002), pp. 20-32.

[6] London, 1969.

[7] *Simone Weil: 'The Just Balance'* (Cambridge, 1989). At one time, he had had the idea of combining Spinoza and Weil as the theme of a book.

[8] London, 1958, p. 24.

[9] For discussions of this, see 'Particularity and Morals' in *TMS*; on Popper's distinction, see 'Nature and Convention', in *Ethics and Action* (London, 1972) – henceforth *EA*; on Stevenson's distinction, see "‚*Eine Einstellung zur Seele*'", *TMS*. (On a couple of occasions, Winch would somewhat confusingly use German quotations from Wittgenstein as the titles of essays in English.)

[10] Cp., for instance, "‚*Im Anfang war die Tat*'", in *TMS*, and 'True or False?', *Inquiry* 31 (1988), pp. 265-76.

[11] This theme is particularly prominent in the essays 'Human Nature', in *EA,* as well as 'Text and Context' and "‚*Eine Einstellung zur Seele*'", both in *TMS*.

[12] Winch discusses this relation in his essay "‚*Im Anfang war die Tat*'". One might argue about the Kantian elements in Winch's thought. A Kantian attitude, it appears, is the most clearly discernible in 'Ceasing to Exist'.

[13] On this, see for instance Winch's essay 'Darwin, *Genesis* and Contradiction', in *TMS*.

[14] Op. cit. The 2nd edition, with a new preface, was published by Routledge in 1990. The book originally appeared in the series *Studies in Philosophical Psychology* under

the editorship of R. F. Holland. Its title, with its echoes of Collingwood's *The Idea of History*, was proposed by Holland.

[15] Op. cit., see esp. pp. 86 ff.

[16] Some of the main contributions to this debate are to be found in Bryan Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford, 1970). See esp. the essays by Martin Hollis and Alasdair MacIntyre. Also, consider the debate between Winch and I. C. Jarvie in R. Borger and F. Cioffi (eds.), *Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences* (Cambridge, 1970); H. O. Mounce, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', *Philosophy* 48 (1973), pp. 347-62; Kai Nielsen, 'Rationality and Relativism', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 4 (1974), pp. 313-31; M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford, 1982). For more recent contributions, see Nigel Pleasants, *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory* (London, 1999), Berel Dov Lerner, *Rules, Magic, and Instrumental Reason: A critical interpretation of Peter Winch's philosophy of the social sciences* (London, 2002), Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Reed and Wes Sharrock, *There Is No Such Thing as a Social Science: In Defence of Peter Winch* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2008**).** I have written on these questions in 'Winch on Social Interpretation', in *The Limits of Experience* (Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica, 1994). Among Winch's later contributions to the debate, we may note 'Language, Belief and Relativism', *TMS* (first published in 1976), 'Apel's 'Transcendental Pragmatics'', in S. C. Brown (ed.), *Philosophical Disputes in the Social Sciences* (Brighton, 1979), and 'Can We Understand Ourselves?', *Philosophical Investigations* 20 (1997), pp. 193-204.

[17] 'Mr. Louch's Idea of a Social Science', *Inquiry* 7 (1964), p. 207.

[18] Op. cit., p. 203.

[19] *The Idea of a Social Science*, 2nd ed., pp. xvii f.

[20] Reprinted in *EA*.

[21] See R. F. Holland, 'Is Goodness a Mystery?', *The University of Leeds Review*, May 1970; reprinted in his book *Against Empiricism* (Oxford, 1980). For Winch's response, see the introduction to *EA*, pp. 4 f.

[22] *EA*, pp. 42 f. All italics mine except the last one.

[23] It might also be suggested, in tune with Wittgenstein's discussion in *On Certainty* (Oxford, 1969) that the line between the *a priori* and the empirical here is not an absolute one; that our understanding of conceptual possibilities is conditioned by experience.

[24] In *TMS*. Swift's point is evidently a different one. He seems to be arguing that the Yahoos bring out something essential about human nature.

[25] 'Man and Society in Hobbes and Rousseau' (1971, in *EA*) also dealt with this theme.

[26] 'Moral Integrity' was originally published in 1968. See also the essays 'Can a Good Man be Harmed?' (1966), 'Wittgenstein's Treatment of the Will' (1968), 'Ethical Reward and Punishment' (1970) and 'Trying' (1971), all in *EA*. For a valuable account of this phase in Winch's ethical thought, see D. Z. Phillips, "The Presumption of Theory" in his *Interventions in Ethics* (London, 1992).

[27] 'Moral Integrity', p. 190. The last sentence is a quotation from Tolstoy's story. A couple of observations may be in place here. For one thing, we should beware of over-simplifying the contrast between the internal and the external invoked by Winch and

Tolstoy. As Winch makes clear, the admiration directed at Father Sergius would hardly have moved him unless he had taken it to be directed at something he found important. And of course, Sergius is hardly someone to whom a concern, say, for goodness or uprightness is *totally* external in this sense. When Winch writes ‘the use of these terms already presupposes that one does see it from a perspective from which it matters’, one needs to realize – and Winch is hardly forgetting – that even if someone is presently insensitive to a certain perspective she may still be able to discover, or recover, that perspective. In fact, that is what Sergius finally does. He would, it seems, be most aptly described as a victim of self-deception: unnoticed by him, the focus of his concern has shifted from the people he is attempting to help to his own moral perfection – a shift which is facilitated by the admiration he inspires. (More on this below.) His corruption reaches its peak when, in the face of an erotic temptation, he finds himself wondering why being a certain kind of person should matter:

> Marie’s question ‘What does it matter?’ invited a judgement explaining why religious purity is more important than the satisfaction of lust, a comparison, as it were, between two objects. And no such judgement was possible. I do not mean that earlier, at the time of his strength, Sergius *could* have answered the question; the point is that, from that earlier perspective, the question did not arise for him. (p. 189)

Winch goes on to argue that ‘the thought of something as really worthy of admiration is indeed involved when anyone takes pleasure in being admired’ – only we need to distinguish between corrupt and non-corrupt *forms* of admiration. This is perhaps overstating the point. It would be true to say that we enjoy the admiration of others to the extent that it confirms that we are what we *wish* to be. But *this* need not be worthy of admiration. With regard to certain objects, such as worldly success in its various forms (fame, wealth, power), there is nothing that would qualify as a non-corrupt form of admiration; still, people do tend to admire those who possess them.

[28] Op. cit., pp. 172 f.

[29] See Taylor’s essay ‘What is Human Agency?’ in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge, 1985).

[30] In conversation, Winch once referred to a story from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky to illustrate the logic of generosity: ‘Once upon a time there was a peasant woman and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deed of hers he could remember to tell to God; “She once pulled up an onion in her garden,” said he, “and gave it to a beggar woman.” And God answered: “You take that onion then, hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her come to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, then the woman must stay where she is.” The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her. “Come,” said he, “catch hold and I’ll pull you out.” He began cautiously pulling her out. He had just pulled her right out, when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn out,

began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and she began kicking them. "I'm to be pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours." As soon as she said that, the onion broke. And the woman fell into the lake and she is burning there to this day. So the angel wept and went away.' (Trans., Constance Garnett.) Holland expresses a similar perspective in 'Good and Evil in Action', op. cit.

[31] Winch, op. cit., pp. 177 f.

[32] P. 178. In one of his last essays, Winch distances himself from expressing the relation between different moral outlooks as a difference between 'perspectives', suggesting that this makes light of the kind of conflict that may arise between them. See 'Doing Justice or Giving the Devil his Due', in D. Z. Phillips (ed.), *Can Religion be Explained Away?* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 171 and n. 14. This comment on his own earlier work is reminiscent of that in the preface to the new edition of *The Idea of a Social Science*. However, I do not see the necessity of taking the term 'perspective' in the way he suggests.

[33] To deny that a different judgement would have been possible is not to exclude the possibility of *respecting* judgements that differ from one's own.

[34] This essay was first published in 1969. The quotation is from *EA*, p. 84.

[35] P. 178.

[36] First published in 1983. The quotations are from *TMS*, pp. 169, 170. For a related discussion, see 'The Universalizability of Moral Judgements' (*EA*). A treatment of moral realism that Winch must have found congenial is that of Cora Diamond in 'Wittgenstein, Mathematics and Ethics: Resisting the Attractions of Realism', in H. Sluga & D. Stern (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, 1996).

[37] In *TMS.*

[38] Winch returned to the Samaritan example in 'Professor Anscombe's Moral Philosophy', in L. Alanen, S. Heinämaa and Th. Wallgren (eds.), *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics* (Basingstoke, 1997). For discussions of it, see D. Z. Phillips, 'My Neighbour and My Neighbours', in his *Interventions in Ethics*, and my essay 'On Being Neighborly', in J. Whittaker (ed.) *The Possibilities of Sense* (Basingstoke, 2002).

[39] I have discussed the notion of moral necessity in an essay with that title in Raimond Gaita (ed.), *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch* (London, 1990), reprinted in *The Limits of Experience*.

[40] On the nature of philosophical disagreement, see Winch's essay 'Apel's "Transcendental Pragmatics"', op. cit. He returned to the issue in some of his late work, e.g., in 'Persuasion', in P. French, T. Uehling, Jr. & H. Wettstein (eds.), *The Wittgenstein Legacy: Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XVII (Notre Dame, 1992), as well as in 'The Expression of Belief', in T. McCarthy & S. Stidd (eds.), *Wittgenstein in America* (Oxford, 2001).

[41] For examples of this, see, for instance, the essay 'Can We Understand Ourselves?', *Philosophical Investigations* 20 (1997).

[42] The importance and the difficulty of doing justice to a position from which we feel distant was the theme of ‘Doing Justice or Giving the Devil his Due’, *Can Religion be Explained Away?* (Basingstoke, 1996)

[43] I wish to thank Kevin Cahill, David Cockburn, John Edelman, Olli Lagerspetz, Sean Stidd and Christopher Winch, as well as the participants in the research seminar at Åbo, for a number of useful comments on earlier versions of this essay. I should also have wished to thank the late D. Z. Phillips, but unfortunately he is beyond the reach of my thanks.

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Chapter 3

R. F. Holland: Absolute Ethics and the Challenge of Compassion

HEIDI NORTHWOOD

> The complete egoist then is a man of 'absolute conceptions'. In this way the problem of false semblances makes an inroad into the nature and style of absolute conceptions.[1]

I

In the moral dilemmas that are so often used in undergraduate ethics courses, students are confronted with a choice between 'doing the right thing', which has horrible consequences, and doing something which seems wrong but has a 'happier' result. In this way, these dilemmas appear almost to be primers for consequentialist thinking. Given the way such examples are usually set up, students are forced to find sense in choosing 'the lesser of the two evils'.

In his article 'Absolute Ethics, Mathematics and the Impossibility of Politics', R. F. Holland[2] considers such an example from Bernard Williams. Twenty South American Indians are about to be executed for protesting the policies and actions of the current government. An honored visitor arrives and is given a choice:

> . . . the captain is happy to offer him a guest's privilege of killing one of the Indians himself. If Jim accepts, then as a special mark of the occasion, the other Indians will be let off. Of course, if Jim refuses, then there is no special occasion, and Pedro here will do what he was about to do . . .[3]

According to what Holland calls 'consequentialist ethics', the answer is obvious: kill the one Indian. We must put aside our moral scruples and make the tough decisions that come with living in the world. We don't have the luxury of remaining true to those moral absolutes we learned in Sunday school; those are for the lucky. In the real world things are much more complicated than that; in the real world we need to make compromises.

Holland, however, doesn't find this line of thought convincing. Instead, goodness is something absolute and requires the renunciation of what Holland calls the 'relative ends' of the world. With an absolute ethics, in contrast to any form of consequentialism, some things simply cannot be done, despite one's desire to fix, to help. Despite the tug one may feel to make the best of a horrible situation, one must forego actions like killing the one Indian, with the unhappy result that one may seem to be left with no plausible options at all:

> . . . the difficulty [such dilemmas] present is exacerbated by the kind of consistency that an absolute ethics demands, to the point of seeming to render the agent's position completely hopeless; whereas the consequentialist invariably hopes to bring about something.[4]

Indeed, given such 'seeming hopelessness', it might be thought that Holland should be arguing for a kind of retreat from the world so that such conflicts would not arise. If absolute ethics and living in the world cannot be reconciled, perhaps it would be best to find that sheltering wall and let the dust and dirt fly by. But this is not what Holland believes. Elsewhere,[5] in discussing Kierkegaard's idea of an eternal resolution,[6] Holland considers a kind of retreat that some have found possible, what he calls 'seemingly the most radical form of renunciation of the relative ends of the world': 'sitting motionless in a monastery'.[7] But in this discussion, as in his discussion of Williams' example, Holland seems to reject this kind of retreat. Agreeing with Kierkegaard, he writes, 'The rejection of relative ends must be encompassed . . . in action, not through inactivity'.[8] This seems to leave open the possibility of a kind of withdrawal from the world – one that will not amount to 'inactivity' – that Holland would not reject. But to withdraw from the world *so as* to resolve conflicts occasioned by an absolute ethics is, Holland writes, impossible:

> For you do not start with a clean sheet: there will already be commitments, to preserve institutions and to look after individuals, and since you cannot do this if you retreat, what is being contemplated puts you in a dilemma. If you find yourself obliged to abdicate you are involved in a moral contradiction.[9]

Where to retreat is to abdicate one's responsibilities to others, this will be to fail in one's (absolute) commitments. Retreating, then, is no salvation from the dilemmas, for these absolute commitments to others will be part of what one must honor if one is to be good.

But if one cannot retreat and be at the same time good, and yet one also cannot kill the Indian and so make the best of a bad situation, what is left? What is one to *do*? Is one just supposed to stand there and watch the captain kill all twenty men? Holland raises the question himself: Could the visitor 'be as good a person as it is possible to conceive' and either shoot the Indian *or decline*?[10] Holland says 'no'. But it is not that he offers a clear directive for alternative action. Instead, he points out that the example itself is flawed (as, no doubt, he would say that all such examples are flawed). The fanciful nature of it and of all other examples of its kind hides 'the source of the sense of outrage at being asked to contemplate' it.[11] He continues:

> The sort of make-believe involved is different from that which occurs when a playwright of the stature to do it shows us something from which we can learn. When Shakespeare for example presents characters imaginatively in their entanglements with evil, our sense of the reality of our own relationship to both evil and good is heightened, whereas here we are drawn into an exercise of fancy about just that relationship. It is a kind of temptation: that is what the revulsion is about.[12]

In the example Williams offers, we are made to believe that both alternatives in the dilemma are equally problematic. This is because we are offered the consequences of both alternatives, which is completely fanciful since, of course, we can never know the consequences of our actions beforehand. Thus we become distracted from the action itself, whether it is good or evil, and our decision is removed from real life. As such it has nothing to teach us and we are led to treat ethical choices as if they were problems of arithmetic.

On the other hand, if the example were transformed into something closer to life, something closer to what we find in great literature, then it might cease to have the two equally unpalatable choices. If, for example, who the visitor is – what kind of a man he is – were included, the example would cease to have the character of a mere calculation. Imagine, Holland writes, that the visitor is a saint. While he is clear that predicting what a saint would say or do in such circumstances 'goes against the grain', if only because the saint is not concerned with consequences, Holland nonetheless offers some possibilities of just the sort that the example in its abstract form hides from us:

> I suppose that maybe he would manage somehow to take the place of the one Indian; or if he could not get himself shot instead of him, perhaps he would make sure that he was shot along with him or else as the first of the twenty. That is if the Captain had not thus far been given pause, for there is what a saint might say to be thought of as well as what he might do, and being spoken to by a saint would not be like being spoken to by an ordinary person; so perhaps it would not then be so much a matter of what the Captain might or might not do, as what the men in his company were prepared to do, and what the bystanders might be moved to do, after having seen and heard the saint.[13]

This is to transform the example from clean to messy, from abstract to real – where people interact and so can learn from one another, and as such it can show us something, but not something specific about what action should be taken. Instead, we might come to understand something of what it is to be good.[14]

Absolute ethics, then, requires of at least most of us that we stay in the world, in the thick of it. It requires that we attempt to be good and do the good, using as our models such moral heroes as saints. It requires that we forego those actions which would involve us in compromising our absolutes and so compromising with evil. Holland is inspiring here, I think. The thought experiment he proposes to us not only shows us what is wrong with moral dilemmas of the kind so often used in classrooms, but also makes clear why so many characters in literature – characters like Socrates in the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, and Iphigenia in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* – are so moving. They are so because they can show us true goodness; and conversely, they can show us where evil really resides. They can awaken our desire to be good and do the good.

But, again, all of this comes with a price. In not being willing to make compromises in order to make a bad situation 'good', we open ourselves up to 'limitless suffering':

> The moral geometry which puts the doing of evil outside the agent's limit, while providing him with infinite space in which to suffer when others do it, puts a limitation also on the good that he can achieve. Much that would otherwise have been possible, especially the most spectacular, world-historical part

> of it, has to be forgone; and this too is at the cost of suffering – his own and other people's.[15]

While one's own suffering need not take the form of death, as it does for Socrates, Iphigenia, and perhaps the saint, it can, in a sense, be much worse than that. Absolute ethics – this 'ethics of foregoing' as Holland calls it[16] – can make one appear cold to one's loved ones, and to have no compassion for their suffering or the suffering of others. After all, if one did feel compassion, it seems that one would act. Thus one can appear to place one's 'integrity' above the needs of others. Is this not itself to fail in one's real obligations out of selfishness, and so not to be good after all?

Such possibilities for limitless suffering – especially, again, that of others – may well be the greatest challenge to any absolute ethics. For it can be very difficult to see that staying true to one's principles is better than bending a little when doing so will prevent or stop others' suffering. The challenge here is, one might say, the challenge of compassion itself, of the sense that we need to eliminate the suffering that comes with a commitment to absolutes through the adoption of a new morality, one of compassion and, consequently, of compromise. Moreover, if the dilemmas of the classroom fail to teach us as great literature might, the dilemmas we find in great literature might themselves present this challenge of compassion most forcefully, for there we might see what happens when an ethics of foregoing and an ethics of compassion come up against one other. Indeed, Sophocles' *Ajax* may seem to exemplify precisely such a call to give up the inflexibility of absolutes for the sake of compassion, a compassion that would save us from tragedy. There may be tragic elements in the *Ajax*, but by and large they can seem to be contained within the first half of the play, which ends with Ajax's suicide. The second half can seem like a different play, almost as if tacked on to the first. The interested parties argue over whether Ajax's body should receive proper burial. But unlike Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the resolution of a similar challenge does constitute a tragedy – precisely a tragedy of infinite suffering, of inflexibility – the resolution in the *Ajax* – that in spite of Ajax's treachery and suicide, he be given a proper burial – appears decidedly *untragic*; in the end everyone seems satisfied. All the interested parties in the dispute about Ajax's corpse come to an agreement, orchestrated by Odysseus. To our modern ears, this sounds like an untragic, common-sensical solution to conflict: compromise. Would it not be ridiculous and foolhardy for the parties to do anything else? Indeed, the chorus declares, ‘There is wisdom in you, Odysseus. Whoever denies it is a fool’ (lns. 1560-61).[17] Where’s the tragedy?

I want to pursue this question so as to consider what sort of challenge great literature can at least appear to present to the absolute ethics that Holland articulates. And I want to begin with a reading of the *Ajax* offered by Herbert Golder. For Golder suggests that the play both calls us to give up an absolute ethics and yet at the same time acknowledges an element of tragedy in our doing so. Eventually, I will suggest that the tragedy of the *Ajax* goes deeper than Golder thinks. But he gives us a place to start.

II

> Aias, the immovable man of honor, is . . . bound to outlive his world, to see it change and time pass him by. He is not ‘a man for all seasons.’ Achilles is at least spared the pathos of living on in an unheroic age. But Aias lives to see his heroic labors come to nothing. His tragedy, however, is not simply that of individual obsolescence, but also that of a society that sacrifices its highest ideals of honor and nobility to expediency.[18]

If we take Golder’s suggestion seriously, then it is possible to see the *Ajax* as a tragedy, but one of a different kind from the *Antigone*’s tragedy of inflexible absolutes. Instead, we may seem to have a tragedy of ‘flexibility’: something important is lost in an ethics of compassion and compromise. Seen in this light, that the parties do compromise is what makes the outcome of the play tragic. But, at the same time, compromise seems to be necessary if one is to live with others, and so it is just as well that these ‘absolute ideals’ are gone.

There are strong hints of this within the play itself. For while no one is completely happy with the result of the compromise (except perhaps Odysseus), it is very difficult to see the solution as anything other than good. Teukros, Ajax’s brother, is left to bury the corpse. While he got what he wanted in one sense, a burial, what he really wanted was that Ajax receive the armor of Achilles. It was rightfully his, and as second only to Achilles, he would have received it had Menelaos and Agamemnon not fixed the voting of the judges and given the armor to Odysseus (lns. 481-88, 1270-73).[19] That Teukros is allowed to bury the dead hero is, surely, a poor substitute. But it is what is possible, and Teukros is grateful to Odysseus for bringing it about: ‘You’re a noble man, Odysseus. I praise you for all that you’ve said. How greatly I misjudged you!’ (lns. 1570-72).[20] Menelaos and Agamemnon, on the other hand, are at first unequivocally unsatisfied. Each of them nearly comes to blows with Teukros over Ajax’ body. It is only Odysseus’ arrival when Agamemnon is about to respond to the last of Teukros’ insults that ‘loosens this struggle’ (ln. 1481).[21] Taking the side of Teukros, Odysseus says to Agamemnon:

> Hear me, then. Before the gods, do not dare to cast this man out unburied, so callously! Never let violence drive you so far in your hate that you tread on justice. I, too, found him hateful once, more than any other man, after I won the armor of Achilles. But though he held to his enmity, I would not repay him now with dishonor, or deny that in my eyes he was the greatest of all who came to Troy, second only to Achilles. If you dishonor him, there can be no justice in it. You will not harm him, you will harm the laws of the gods. To strike at a brave man when he is dead can never be just, no matter how much you hate him. (lns. 1500-18)[22]

Agamemnon resists Odysseus’ rhetoric about justice, saying that honor requires that Odysseus trample Ajax’s body (ln. 1523).[23] Eventually Agamemnon acquiesces as a result of being asked for a favor. But he is at first thoroughly perplexed by Odysseus’ request, for Odysseus appears to be protecting an *enemy*, placing the interests of Ajax over those of Agamemnon, his friend. Of Ajax Odysseus says, ‘My enemy, it’s true, yet once he was noble’ (lns. 1534-35),[24] and ‘I am moved more by his greatness than by my enmity’ (lns. 1538-39).[25] For Agamemnon, such instability of opinion makes Odysseus untrustworthy (ln. 1539).[26] But Odysseus is adamant:

> Od: I assure you, most men are that way, now friendly, now hostile.
> Ag: And are these the sort of friends you would praise?
> Od: I would not praise an obstinate mind!
> Ag: You will make us look like cowards.
> Od. Not cowards but men of justice – so all the Greeks will call you.
> Ag: I must let them bury the body, is that what you say?
> Od: It is. *I will face the same need some day.* (lns. 1540-49, emphasis added)[27]

Agamemnon responds with incredulity: ‘It’s all one, then, and each man works for himself’ (lns. 1550-51).[28] Odysseus does not seem to catch the sarcasm in this and replies, ‘There is reason in that. Who else should I work for?’ (lns. 1551-52).[29]

Agamemnon, strikingly like Ajax here, wants to resist Odysseus because of what is required by honor. Odysseus *should* trample Ajax's body, given that Ajax would happily have tortured and killed Odysseus, and indeed, thought he had done so in his madness. Honor requires that Odysseus prevent the burial of Ajax. But Odysseus does not want this, and this is what is so surprising to Agamemnon. He is not (or is no longer) 'obstinate', but instead is flexible. While recognizing that Ajax is his enemy, he also admires him. He recognizes that *all* men can be brought low, even Ajax; even nobility is not unchangeable. Consequently, while Ajax is his enemy, he can also 'pity (*epoiktirô*) the poor wretch' (lns. 147-48).[30] In fact, this is the lesson that Athena had taught him at the outset of the play. At that point, Odysseus was just as inflexible as the others. Indeed, the play opens with Athena's observation that Odysseus is once again 'hunting out some advantage against [his] enemies' in his pursuit of Ajax (lns. 1-3).[31] And again at lines 21 and 92 Odysseus describes Ajax as simply his enemy.[32] But Odysseus softens when he looks directly at Ajax in his madness. And it is Athena who makes him do this (lns. 79-105).[33] It is seeing Ajax torturing the livestock thinking that it is the Greek army – indeed, hearing Ajax say that he has Odysseus himself inside his tent cowering in chains, that he is about to tie him to a post in the yard and flay him – that moves Odysseus to pity: 'He's yoked to an evil delusion, but the same fate could be mine. I see clearly: we who live are but all phantoms, fleeting shadows' (lns. 149-52).[34]

What Odysseus sees in looking directly at Ajax is that he too could be brought low by the gods. He too could be in need of pity and compassion. And this realization allows him to pity Ajax and ultimately persuade Agamemnon to allow Ajax's corpse to receive proper burial. While it is a kind of self-interest that leads to this – Odysseus is willing to forego his right to vengeance so that in the long run he too might escape the justice of the inflexible ancient ideals – it has a happy result. He has transferred his commitment from these absolutes to peace within the community. So, as Agamemnon himself recognizes, this means that Odysseus is now working for himself. But again, as Odysseus himself says, 'There is reason in that. Who else should I work for?' (1551-52).[35]

Odysseus, then, comes to represent a progressive flexibility and thus, too, the end of the kind of tragedy that results from the inflexible ancient ideals of *arete*; Ajax, Menelaos, and Agamemnon, on the other hand, exemplify the ‘ancient simplicity’ of a life lived by honor. What the intervention of Athena seems to signal is that times have changed: there is no longer room for the bigger-than-life hero Ajax once was. Instead, as Athena says, ‘The gods favor wise restraint in men and hate transgressors’ (lns. 160-61).[36]

Seen in this light, the *Ajax* might be considered a creation story, the myth that relates our ‘fall’ to the kind of ambiguous morality that is now upon us, where men need to be responsive to the changeable world, but then are themselves changeable and so open to the charge of being untrustworthy. And yet while this fall is perhaps tragic in the sense that we have come to live in a world in which expediency and compromise have taken the place of honor and nobility and where what was once considered ‘honor and nobility’ is now a ‘transgression’, the point also seems to be that this is just as well. Despite the fact that a kind of self-interest has taken the place of a commitment to honor, surely it is better that all the interested parties give a little and no more blood be shed. Indeed, Golder, while seeing the entire play as a unified tragedy, nonetheless sees in Odysseus’ ‘each man works for himself’ a new morality that ‘represents the new ethos of democratic Athens at its best’.[37] Golder continues: ‘[Odysseus] speaks as a man who understands that since all men suffer the same fate, compassion and compromise are the appropriate virtues’.[38] Indeed, even the ‘immoveable’ Ajax does not seem completely unmoved by the pull of this view. In the course of the first half of the play – in the last few hours of his life – he too learns that nothing is unchangeable. When he first returns to his senses, he seems to be incapable of focusing on anything except his hatred of Odysseus, despite knowing that it was the goddess and not Odysseus who was the cause of his madness: ‘Spying everywhere, tool of all evils, filthiest scum of the army. Odysseus, you must be somewhere laughing and gloating now!’ (lns. 413-16);[39] ‘O Zeus, father of my fathers, let me kill that skulking schemer and the two high kings, and die!’ (lns. 422-26).[40] But very quickly, in his realization that he is no longer who he was, that fate and the gods have brought him very low, he begins to turn his attention away from Odysseus and to the significance of his own shaming.

The genesis of Ajax’s change is found in his interaction with his concubine Tekmessa and, like the change of Odysseus, it is occasioned by pity. Recalling the language from the scene between Hektor and Andromache in the *Iliad*, Tekmessa tries to persuade Ajax not to die, not to kill himself. The chorus responds to her words with ‘If your mind can be moved to pity (*oikton*) as mine is, Aias, you will praise her words' (lns. 587-89).[41] But Ajax remains aloof: 'She will win my praise if she does what I command' (lns. 589-90).[42] This turns out to be bringing their son to him, and as it becomes clear to Tekmessa that he really is saying goodbye, she becomes frantic: 'Can't I move you?', 'For god's sake, soften!' (lns. 669, 672).[43] Again Ajax brushes her words aside: 'It is foolish to think you can school me now!' (lns. 672-73).[44] But almost immediately, in his famous speech on the nature of time, he admits (to himself alone) that she has in fact moved him, that time changes all, even him:

> Great, unfathomable time brings dark things into the light and buries the bright in darkness. Nothing is too strange, time seizes the most dread oath, the most hardened mind. Even I, whose will was tempered like iron, unbending in action, for a woman's sake am become a woman in my speech. Yes, the thought of leaving her a widow, surrounded by enemies, and my son an orphan, moves me to pity (*oiktirô*). (lns. 712-23)[45]

Like Odysseus, Ajax is moved to pity; he suffers in thinking of their suffering (indeed, his name is apt; as Golder writes, '*Aias* (from *aiadzein*, "to cry in pain" . . .) *is* his destiny'[46]). He picks up the theme of change again several lines later, appearing to relate his own capacity for change to that of the elemental powers:

> And in time to come we will know how to yield to the gods and learn to bow down before the Atreidai. They command and we must obey. For even the most awesome powers submit to authority: snow-tracked winter yields to the rich growth of summer, dark-vaulted night gives way to the shining, white-horsed brightness of day, a blast of appalling wind stills the sea's rage, even all-overwhelming sleep binds only to let go. Then how shall we not learn wise-restraint? (lns. 739-52)[47]

Ajax is no longer immoveable: his pity for a woman has softened his iron will; he has learned how to yield.

All the same, while it is true that Ajax can now be moved, a closer look at these passages reveals that Ajax's lesson is very different from Odysseus'. And this, I think, should make us cautious about accepting Golder's understanding of the *Ajax*: that 'compassion and compromise are the appropriate virtues'[48] to replace the hard ancient ideals and the 'limitless suffering' that comes with following them.

For a start, Ajax's compassion for Tekmessa and their son is not the same as the pity that Odysseus feels for Ajax, despite the fact that the same word (cognates of *oiktirô*) is used to describe both. Ajax feels pity for them because he will be leaving them a widow and orphan surrounded by enemies. He pities them because of his love for them; he does not want to see them suffer. There is nothing self-interested in this. Odysseus, on the other hand, pities Ajax because he realizes that he could face the same need someday; Odysseus' pity is founded on a kind of identification with Ajax that shows his pity to be self-directed, self-interested. These are different forms of pity, so different that it might seem better to call them by different names.

But further, we also need to look more closely at Ajax's use of the elemental powers as a model for his own submission in the Time Speech. For this suggests a submission very different from the submission of Odysseus. Winter 'submits' to summer not by becoming something different, but by removing itself; winter itself does not change. The same is true for night and sleep. These elemental powers are what they are through the change; they retain their identity and their essence. But they give way – they submit – to their opposite. They are like the opposites in Anaximander's surviving fragment: '. . . they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time'.[49] This is what Ajax seems to take to heart: he must 'go away'; he must die, despite the pity he feels for Tekmessa and their son. He submits by ceasing to be, but it is *he*, albeit brought low, who ceases to be.

This is not what Odysseus learned from Athena. Instead, for Odysseus, a thing submits by undergoing a change within itself. What Odysseus learned from Athena was that he should be flexible when once he was rigid. And in taking in this lesson, in an important sense, he *did* cease to be, only not by giving way to an opposite as an elemental power does and as Ajax did. Instead, Odysseus learned to submit, to cease to be, as red paint 'submits' or ceases to be when mixed with yellow. Neither red nor yellow remains through the change; each is completely transformed, as was Odysseus.[50]

Ajax, then, learns to submit, but his submission means that he must 'go away'; for in a vital sense, he has remained 'immoveable'. Odysseus' world cannot accommodate him. But this is not Golder's reading of the play. Golder believes that Odysseus' bold new vision can incorporate

Ajax's 'ancient simplicity': Odysseus recognizes compassion and compromise as the foundation of society[51] and . . . is therefore able to adapt even the self-willed exceptional man, Aias, to his democratic vision'.[52] He continues:

> This is not Homeric individualism in the grand manner; but neither is it the opportunistic selfishness of the final years of the Athenian fifth century. It is both political and tragic wisdom: the foundation for a society in which compassion is perceived as the basis of preservation. Thucydides wrote:
>
> > …men too often take upon themselves in the prosecution of their revenge to set the example of doing away with those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity, instead of allowing them to subsist against the day of danger when their aid may be required. (3.84, Crawley transl.)
>
> Odysseus, contrary to expectation, shows how society might preserve not only 'that ancient simplicity into which honor so largely entered' (3.83) but also those endangered 'general laws'.[53]

But does he? As Golder sees it, 'Sophocles refuses full closure' regarding just how 'Odysseus' and 'Ajax' are to 'live together' in this new political reality.[54] But what could 'full closure' actually look like? How could 'that ancient simplicity' be preserved by those 'appropriate virtues' of 'compassion and compromise'? The question to ask here is what, if anything, can be 'preserved' by compassion and compromise. Indeed, exactly how is compassion itself to be distinguished from 'opportunistic selfishness'? And how is 'compromise' to be distinguished from infinite 'flexibility'? It is not clear that we can see such distinctions at work in Odysseus' 'bold new vision'.

III

Holland himself addresses at least one of these questions. If compassion does not refer to something beyond itself, something beyond, say, a general wish to reduce suffering, then it cannot be distinguished from hedonism. This is so even if one is concerned primarily to reduce the suffering of others. In this form, however, the hedonism can be hidden from us, and so we can be deceived about what we are doing:

> In the course of a dialogue concerning the problem of false semblances Plato remarked, to people whom he charged with self-deception, 'You neglect ge-

> ometry' (*Gorgias* 508A). He was addressing those who did not see goodness as distinct: in particular they did not see it as something distinct from pleasure. Equally they did not see goodness as independent of the will and antithetical to assertion of the self. They were engaged in the pursuit of more (*pleonexia*), and not necessarily for themselves alone – perhaps this was so in the conversation to which I am alluding, but Plato was mindful of the variant in which they want more for the generality and so put themselves at the service of the social.[55]

While it may appear that helping and fixing and maintaining peace within the community in an Odyssean world is based on a version of the good, without something other than Odyssean compassion at the core, without limits like those found in geometry to ground this compassion – limits that are 'independent of the will and antithetical to assertion of the self' – such compassion can only be governed by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. But it will not be called 'hedonism'. Thus the self-deception, a self-deception maintained by the changing meanings of the words we use to describe the things involved in such compromises.[56] In the *Ajax* itself what counts as a 'transgression' is no longer the failure to honor unbending absolutes but the failure to honor men; 'self-restraint' comes to mean submitting to the (incoherent) demands of 'keeping the peace'; 'justice' becomes honoring those who have fallen so that we might all be honored when we fall; 'pity' which once involved the pain of seeing a beloved suffer now means acknowledging the pains of others so as to avoid them oneself. Indeed, Golder himself seems to fall victim to this kind of self-deception. He believes that Odysseus' 'democratic vision' can incorporate even 'the self-willed exceptional man, Aias'. Golder is calling Ajax by the same name, but the 'Ajax' who can be folded into Odysseus' new morality is now 'self-willed' and 'exceptional', no longer 'noble'. The only way for Ajax to be incorporated is for us to change what he represents. And our doing so creates the illusion that we've been able to pull it off, that we've been able to preserve the absolutes in this new flexible world.

It is especially ironic that Golder appeals to Thucydides here, for that there can be no absolutes in such a world is precisely what Thucydides is trying to show us in the section of his text quoted by Golder above. Even in considering a text that shows the incoherence of an 'absolute' that is self-regarding, Golder appears to be taken in by it. This is Thucydides' famous discussion of the civil strife (*stasis*) of the cities on the island of Corcyra (3.82), where he brings out that in such times of adversity, not only do men do away with the absolutes that would offer salvation, but that this itself is disguised by the changing meanings of words: ‘Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them’ (3.82.4).[57] And while Thucydides is speaking here of the worst of times – civil war or *stasis* – Plato shows how the same thing can happen to the individual whenever there is an analogous civil war within the soul, linking it to compromise, and even suggesting that these psychic civil wars can get their start in a kind of compassion. By way of conclusion it might be worth spelling this out in some detail.

In his description of the degeneration of the best city in *Republic* Book VIII, Plato writes that once conflict arises between its best and worst parts, the ‘perfect city’ goes ‘to the middle’ (*eis to meson*). It finds a place between the two opposed camps. It compromises:

> Once division (*stasis*) had come on the scene . . . the two strains of iron and bronze in their race each pulled them in the direction of moneymaking and of acquiring land and houses and gold and silver, while the other two strains of gold and silver, inasmuch as they weren’t needy but rich in their souls by nature, led them toward virtue and the ancient order of things. When they came into violence and strife against one another, they agreed to a compromise. (547B)[58]

The ‘middle’ here is a city dominated by spiritedness (548C). But this means that the rulers and guardians became flexible when they should have remained steadfast. The same progression occurs with each new degeneration of the city and, analogously, of the soul: conflict (*stasis*), or sometimes even just the threat of it, occasions a compromise. But this compromise is always between a better and worse part: we become lovers of honor through a compromise between loving wisdom and loving money; we become lovers of money by compromising our love of honor and our other desires (550E); we become democratic through a compromise between loving money and our worst desires (572C-D). Each move ‘to the middle’ takes us further away from the unchangeable absolutes. But it is already in the first degeneration – from loving wisdom to loving honor – that we have ceased to use external limits and instead have become self-regarding. Thus the door is opened to *pleonexia* from the start.

But that this is what is happening is disguised by the fact that we use the same words to describe the result as we used to describe what we have done away with; what comes with each compromise within the soul is a shift in the meanings of words. Plato illustrates this in his description of the battle between necessary and non-necessary desires within the soul of the youth who ultimately becomes 'democratic':

> Once [the non-necessary desires] come out on top in battle, don't they give shame the name simplemindedness, and push it out, a refugee without honor; don't they call moderation unmanliness, fling mud at it, and throw it out; and don't they persuade the young person that a sense of proportion and orderliness in spending money is unsophisticated and slavish . . . ? . . . [T]hey . . .escort insolence, anarchy, wastefulness, and shamelessness back in, crowned with wreaths, in a torch-lit procession, accompanied by a vast chorus singing their praises and giving them pretty names, calling insolence high education, anarchy freedom, wastefulness flamboyant style, and shamelessness courage. (560D-E)

I said at the outset that Plato believes that compassion can lead to such *stasis* in the soul and so to the sorts of compromises that involve us in the changing of the meanings of words. This, I take it, is behind his objections in *Republic* Book X to our watching certain kinds of tragedy on the stage. For in identifying and so sympathizing with such characters we strengthen that part of the soul that likes to grieve when we undergo misfortune ourselves. As he writes, ' . . . few are capable of reflecting that what we enjoy in others will inevitably react upon ourselves. For after feeding fat the emotion of pity there, it is not easy to restrain it in our own sufferings' (606B). This initiates just the sort of conflict within the soul that Plato is describing in Book VIII. But it is important to see that Plato is not rejecting all forms of pity. Both in the *Republic* as well as other dialogues Socrates either himself pities or says that it is appropriate to pity those who are ignorant.[59] They are truly suffering a misfortune. And the kind of ignorance that *is* pitiable is the kind that is hidden from the person who suffers it; it is the kind involved in 'thinking you know when you don't'. But this is the kind involved in just the sort of self-deception that we have been discussing. It is sad that someone is living his life as if asleep. But like Ajax's pity for Tekmessa, this pity does not turn on any identification with the sufferer.

The kind of compassion that Plato rejects, then, is the kind that directs one's attention to the self, as did Odysseus' compassion for Ajax. For in strengthening the fear that misfortune may come one's way and in suggesting the notion that the proper attitude toward such misfortune is indignation – the very attitude of those 'fretful' characters portrayed on stage

(604D, 605A, D) – not only is one more likely to be immoderate when one undergoes misfortune oneself – which signals that *stasis* between the parts of the soul has begun – but one is also more likely to try to arrange things so that such pain and suffering are avoided (both for oneself and for others). Like the moral dilemmas discussed at the outset of this paper, this self-regarding compassion gets consequentialist thinking started. It involves one in what in the *Phaedo* (68B-69E) Socrates calls 'false virtue'. This is the exchange of pleasure for pleasure, pain for pain, fear for fear 'as if they were coins' (69A).[60] But this, Socrates says, is 'absurd', 'impossible" (*atopos, alogon, adunaton*, 68D-E). It is to be virtuous through vice: 'to be self-restrained through a kind of self-indulgence' (68E); to be courageous through cowardice (68D). We think we are doing what will give us what we want, what is best (no pain or suffering either for ourselves or others or both), and our words reflect this. It is what we call 'courage' or 'moderation'. But this, as Holland himself says, is nonsense to Plato. It is like saying 'I must not do it but I must do it'.[61] But in making these calculations with such coins we fool ourselves into thinking that we can know the consequences of our actions beforehand and thus that such calculations justify what we are about to do.

It is for these reasons that Odysseus' morality is, I think, deceptive. It is a world of false virtue, but one in which this fact is itself concealed because these phantoms of virtue are not given their true names. Hence its seductiveness. Indeed, if there is anything tragic about Sophocles' *Ajax*, it does not seem right to say that it is found in any *hubris* of Ajax. Nor that it lies in the purported 'fact' that we must give up our absolutes in order to get on with things. Instead, it seems that what is tragic in Sophocles' *Ajax* is the *hubris* of this Odyssean attempt to fix things and the self-deception that goes with it. And so Holland seems to be right; to be good is to yield. But this is the yielding of Ajax, not that of Odysseus. This is the 'ethics of foregoing'. And while there is something tragic in it – the tragedy of 'limitless suffering' – there is not the tragedy of self-deception.[62]

NOTES

[1] R. F. Holland, 'Absolute Ethics, Mathematics and the Impossibility of Politics', in *Against Empiricism: On Education, Epistemology and Value*, (New Jersey, 1980), pp. 126-142. (Hereafter 'Absolute Ethics'.) The passage quoted is taken from page 133.

[2] R. F. Holland is Emeritus Professor at the University of Leeds. He taught at University College, Swansea, from 1950 to 1965 and is an Honorary Fellow of the University of Wales, Swansea. He is past president of the Aristotelian Society and of the Mind Association and edited the Routledge series *Studies in Philosophical Psychology* in which appeared, among other works, Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science* and M. O'C. Drury's *The Danger of Words.*

[3] Williams in Smart and Williams: *Utilitarianism For and Against*, p. 98, as quoted by Holland in 'Absolute Ethics', pp. 138-139.

[4] 'Absolute Ethics', p. 138.

[5] R. F. Holland, 'Morality and the Two Worlds Concept', in *Against Empiricism: On Education, Epistemology and Value*, pp. 75-91. (Hereafter 'Morality'.)

[6] What Kierkegaard means by an 'eternal resolution' is, Holland writes, one that is unconditional, and has nothing to do with probabilities or with 'the upshot': 'It is not a resolution whose actuality or effectiveness is judgeable in terms of what it accomplishes: it is not concerned at all with what is outward, with one's success or progress in the world' ('Morality', p. 77).

[7] 'Morality', p. 78.

[8] Ibid.

[9] 'Absolute Ethics', p. 137.

[10] Ibid., p. 138.

[11] Ibid., p. 140.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 141.

[14] Ibid., p. 142.

[15] Ibid., p. 137.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Sophocles, *Aias (Ajax)*, as translated by Herbert Golder and Richard Pevear, (Oxford, 1999). Please note that the line numbers in the Golder/Pevear translation are different from those in the Greek text. I have used their line numbers in the body of the paper, and included the standard Greek line numbers for each quotation in the notes. The current passage can be found at lines 1374-75.

[18] From the Introduction to Sophocles, *Aias (Ajax)*: p. 5. (Hereafter, 'Intro.')

[19] Lns. 441-46, 1135-37.

[20] Lns. 1381-82.

[21] Ln. 1317.

[22] Lns. 1332-45.

[23] Ln. 1348.

[24] Ln. 1355.

[25] Ln. 1357.

[26] Ln. 1358.

[27] Lns. 1359-65.
[28] Ln. 1366.
[29] Ln. 1367.
[30] Lns. 121-22.
[31] Lns. 1-2.
[32] Lns. 18 and 78.
[33] Lns. 66-88.
[34] Lns. 123-26.
[35] Ln. 1367.
[36] Lns. 132-33.
[37] 'Intro.', p. 20.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Lns. 379-82.
[40] Lns. 387-91.
[41] Lns. 525-26.
[42] Lns. 527-28.
[43] Lns. 592, 594.
[44] Lns. 594-95.
[45] Lns. 646-53.
[46] 'Intro.', p. 10. Cf. lns. 468-72 (Greek lns. 430-33).
[47] Lns. 666-77.
[48] 'Intro.', p. 20.
[49] DK 12A9, as translated by G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield in *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, Second Edition, (Cambridge, 1983), and found in their edition as Anaximander fragment 101A.
[50] We can, perhaps, see Ajax's understanding of 'flexibility' or submission most clearly in the context of his attitude towards his sword. He needs, he says, to be purified; he needs to bury his sword, 'the most hostile of weapons, where no one will find it' (lns. 730-31, or Greek lns. 658-59). The story behind this sword is significant, I think. For this is the sword that Ajax received from Hektor. At the end of the first day of fighting in the *Iliad*, Ajax and Hektor are in mortal combat. One of them would surely have died had it not been for heralds, sent by both sides – 'messengers of Zeus and men' (VII. 274) – who put an end to the fighting for the day: 'Fight no more, dear sons, and do not do battle; both of you are loved by Zeus, the cloud-gatherer, and both are spearmen; that surely we all know now. Moreover night is now upon us, and it is well to obey night' (VII. 279-282, translated by A. T. Murray (revised by William F. Wyatt) in *Homer: Iliad,* Books 1-12, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 2003, second edition first published 1999)). Hektor obeys, and proposes that he and Ajax exchange gifts so that many Achaeans and Trojans may say: 'The two fought in rivalry of soul-devouring strife, but then made a compact and parted in friendship' (VII. 01-302). Ajax agrees and gives Hektor his belt; Hektor gives Ajax the sword. For both, however, the gifts are the beginnings of their ends. Ajax speaks of this in the Time Speech: 'Let night and Hades keep it safe from all eyes, for I swear since the day I took it in gift from Hektor, my greatest enemy, I have had no love from the Greeks. It

is true, then: an enemy's gift is no gift but a bringer of loss' (lns. 732-38 or Greek lns. 660-65). Hektor might well have said the same thing, for it was Ajax's belt that was used to drag him around the walls of Troy. Reflecting on this, at the end of his speech, Ajax seems to put a different spin on Odysseus' lesson. He says the following: 'I know now to hate an enemy just so far, for another time we may befriend him. And the friend I help, I will not help too greatly, knowing that one day may find him my enemy. For most mortals friendship is a treacherous harbor' (lns. 753-59 or Greek lns. 678-83). It sounds here as if Ajax has taken on Odysseus' view of friendship. But his actions show that this is not so. Instead, these words signal his understanding of who and what Odysseus is, and that the world had undergone an irreversible change. For even the sword has changed its meaning. When he exchanged gifts with Hektor, the sword signified the hard ancient simplicity – the kind of life where conflict leads to battle, but where there is nobility and admiration of strength, even in one's enemies. Indeed, the impersonal nature of battle seems to have made this possible. Since the warriors were fighting for something other than themselves, they were able to recognize and even celebrate the excellences of their enemies, and not only for the reason that a greater glory goes to him who defeats such an excellent enemy (although this was part of it). But given how the world has changed, the sword now represents Odysseus' new morality. For 'friendship' between two enemies has taken on a new meaning. This, I take it, is the point of Ajax's words quoted above (lns. 753-59, or Greek lns. 678-83). Now such friendships are made with a view to expediency and the attempt to get what one wants. Ajax can do nothing to prevent the reign of Odysseus' morality, but he can bury the sword that he now recognizes has come to take on this new meaning.

[51] 'Intro.', p. 21.

[52] 'Intro.', p. 20.

[53] 'Intro.', p. 21. For the full citation of Thucydides, see note 57 below.

[54] Ibid.

[55] 'Absolute Ethics', pp. 131-32.

[56] Compare Holland: 'What gives to the problem of spurious semblances its depth is the fact that in many circumstances the relative presents itself as indistinguishable from the absolute. When the pursuer of advantage is fighting his way up it is obvious that his power is only relative and we should not think of calling it anything else however vigorous he may be. But once he has got to the top and become a dictator, his power is 'absolute' (we call it that because we no longer see any relativity in it). He has absolute power in the state' ('Absolute Ethics', p. 133).

[57] Translated by Richard Crawley as found in *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, (ed. Robert B. Strassler) (New York, 1998).

[58] Translated by Paul Shorey in *Plato: The Republic, Volume II (Books VI-X)*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1987, first published 1935).

[59] See, for example, *Republic* 518B.

[60] Translated by Harold North Fowler in *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1995, first published 1914).

[61] 'Absolute Ethics', p. 136.

[62] I am indebted to Dan Tkachyk and John Edelman for helping me to work through the ideas of this paper. Most of the points and connections that I attempt to bring out here would not be half as clear as I hope they now are had they not been the generous and astute listeners and readers that they are.

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Chapter 4

J. R. Jones: 'How Do I Know Who I Am?': The Passage from Objects to Grammar

WALFORD GEALY

I

J. R. Jones, at the age of forty, became Professor of Philosophy at Swansea in 1952. At the age of eighteen he had enrolled as a student at the University College of Wales Aberystwyth (as it was then known) and three years later he graduated with a brilliant first-class honors degree in Philosophy. This was followed by an equally fine Master's thesis in two years. The next three years Jones spent at Oxford reading for his D.Phil. and from there he returned to Aberystwyth as a junior lecturer. From Aberystwyth he was appointed to the chair in Swansea. Eighteen years later, he died at the age of fifty-eight.

These brief biographical details are important insofar as they provide a background that illuminates the radical character of the philosophical metamorphosis that Jones gradually underwent after his arrival at Swansea. For most of his academic life, particularly during the formative period of his philosophical development, Jones was under the strong influence of one of the leading British empiricists of the time, the John Locke scholar and celebrated author of a definitive exposition of Locke's *Essay,*[1] Professor R. I. Aaron, who occupied the Philosophy chair at Aberystwyth for over thirty years. Hence, Jones from the very beginning of his academic studies was steeped in the British empiricist tradition. By the time he arrived at Swansea he had developed a deep respect even for Logical Positivism. His inaugural lecture at Swansea is clear proof of this.[2] Consequently, the early period at Swansea must have been nothing less than traumatic for Jones. Could he, at his age and with his philosophical presuppositions, unlearn his empiricism? Could he absorb the new Wittgensteinianism that was so central to all things philosophical at Swansea? Certainly, any change of direction for Jones would require courage and humility as well as intellectual ability and honesty – virtues that Jones, fortunately, possessed in abundance. But did a thoroughgoing and radical revision in his thinking occur? This paper will essay to show what Jones actually achieved. The measure of his success may best be assessed by contrasting his earlier views on two of his principal philosophical preoccupations (the nature of the self and personal identity) with his final statements on these matters. And in order to reveal the widest possible contrast between the two standpoints, greater – although not exclusive – attention will be paid to Jones's first and last papers on these subjects. As it happened, both of these papers were written and published by Jones in his mother tongue of Welsh – although his ideas in these Welsh versions were given almost identical expression in papers published in English philosophy journals.

II

As an empiricist, Jones developed an interest in three related philosophical problems. The first of these was the issue of the relationship between particulars and universals. It was a concern that grew naturally from his Aberystwyth Master's thesis, entitled, *Spinoza's 'Scientia intuitiva' and the Concrete Universal.*[3] This is not the appropriate place to expound Jones's thesis, but it is worth mentioning that it is a first-rate piece of work that clearly shows how outstanding Jones was as a young research student. In this thesis, the youthful, unrestrained Jones displayed considerable independence of thought, and he maintained that Spinoza, in terms of internal consistency, successfully reconciled the Unity of the One (or God or *Substantia*) with the differences of the Many. Jones's chief target of criticism was none other than H. H. Joachim, who in his celebrated work, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*[4]*,* had, according to Jones, inappropriately dismissed and wholly neglected Spinoza's notion of *scientia intuitiva* on the grounds that it was a concept steeped in religious mysticism and was, as such, philosophically irrelevant. In contrast, Jones thought the concept to be of central importance in Spinoza's system, and should be understood in conjunction with another of Spinoza's notions, that of 'concrete universality'. Interestingly, Jones's study of Spinoza led him to make the remarkable claim that the notion of the 'concrete universal' points to a form of knowledge which is more fundamental than science: 'For it insists that the true value of "law" does not lie in the number of instances in which it can be verified, but in the insight which it gives us into the individual and systematic nature of experience.'[5] This insight is a very special perception indeed for, in essence, it is a penetrating criticism of the common empiricist account of the nature of scientific laws in vogue at the time – that they are generalizations from observed instances of particular phenomena. Jones's view seems to anticipate the later Wittgensteinian perspective, which insists that individual empirical observations have sense only within an already existing conceptual framework. Sadly, Jones was not to develop this criticism further, nor is there any evidence that he took up the issue again when he became part of the Swansea school.

Jones's second philosophical preoccupation was with the nature of perception and this again, it may be assumed, arose directly from his Oxford doctoral thesis entitled, *A re-examination of some questions at issue between idealists and realists with regard to the subject-object relation and the nature of mind.*[6] Indeed, certain aspects of his D.Phil. thesis became life-long preoccupations, and a great deal of this thesis is incorporated in some of Jones's writings, particularly in his early publications. This thesis was partly motivated by Jones's interest in psychological behaviorism – or 'the new objective psychology' as Jones used to refer to it. Jones reported that this psychology refused 'to concern itself with the inaccessible "inside" of other creatures' minds.' Jones, nourished on empiricism, showed considerable sympathy with the new psychology, but he could not approve of 'the denial of consciousness' that was implied by it. But neither could he assent fully to the realism of some contemporary empiricists, including G. E. Moore, who accounted for perception in a distinctly dichotomous way by 'speaking of the mind being "here" and the field of perception "there".' In contrast, Jones was attracted by the more intimate connection between subject and object that he found in the thinking of some earlier British Hegelians (including Sir Henry Jones, a late 19th/early 20th century Welsh-speaking philosopher) who advocated 'not so much the mind confronting its objective field but rather comprehending it in such a way that it included it.' Needless to say, this is highly ambiguous language used by J. R. Jones, but whatever he meant by it, he held on to the view that he expressed in these terms until well into his Swansea years.

As the title of the thesis suggests, a large part of it was directly concerned with the nature of mind itself – and, in time, this issue became the main concern of Jones together, of course, with the related problem of our knowledge of other minds. They are the only issues that dominated Jones's thinking during his empiricist period that continued as preoccupations after he came under the influence of the later Wittgenstein. What is the nature of 'mind' or 'self'? And, inextricably connected with this issue, were the further questions: 'How does the mind become aware of its own identity?' and 'How is my mind related to other minds?' Jones wrestled with these matters throughout his professional life and it is in relation to these, particularly the issue of personal identity, that the contrast between his earlier empiricist views and his later Wittgensteinian interpretation of them is most evident.

III

Jones's initial publication on this subject of the self was entitled, '*Sylwadau ar Broblem Natur Hunan*' ('Comments on the Problem of the Nature of Self') and it appeared in the very first issue of the Welsh-Language Philosophy journal, *Efrydiau Athronyddol,* (*Philosophical Studies*) in 1938.[7] This paper must have been written in 1937, just as Jones was completing his postgraduate work at Oxford and immediately before he took up his appointment at Aberystwyth. Much of what Jones had to say in this paper is a distillation of what he wrote about the nature of mind in his D.Phil. thesis. It is, however, a very long and complex article in which Jones meticulously defines his analysis of the self *vis-à-vis* the analyses of eminent, mostly contemporary, philosophers who had or were writing on this subject – including Samuel Alexander, C. A. Strong, C. D. Broad, William James, G. E. Moore, and others – and even Aaron's own interpretation of the Lockian position in his newly published definitive work on Locke. Evidently, in this essay, it will not be possible to define Jones's position in relation to all these thinkers. Yet, through the numerous references made to them in Jones's rich paper, we have a glimpse of that wide spectrum of the kind of empirical analyses of mind that were in vogue at that particular time in Britain, despite the constant attacks that had been made on 'psychologism' by Continental philosophers, such as Frege and Husserl, since the latter part of the 19th century.

Although nowhere in the article is Descartes mentioned, it is transparent that Cartesian dualism lies at the root of the problems with which Jones was concerned. And, in this article, dualism was introduced by Jones in the initial passage by claiming that 'the man in the street' is sure that 'he himself is "real".' But what is this 'he himself'? Jones provided what he thought was an ordinary person's reply. Jones's imagined that any person would be able to list six characteristics of this 'self' and the first of these is that the self is 'something vague' which is connected with an object that is referred to as 'my body'. So Descartes' presupposition is immediately taken on board. The 'self' is different from 'my body'. The plain man is equally able to perceive, in addition, that the self remains 'the same' from experience to experience, may grow or develop, is the subject of all the conditions we endure, is responsible (in general) for all decisions and choices and, finally, that the self is uniquely that which is referred to as 'I'. Jones's man in the street is, indeed, an extraordinary thinker!

The point of this passage was not only to introduce the Cartesian dichotomy and to establish it as if it were the common sense view, but also to expose how unpalatable was the view of the new 'radicals' in philosophy, the Logical Positivists, who denied the reality of this self. A. J. Ayer, for instance, had claimed that the mind is a 'figment' of sensory experience. Jones disagreed – but only because the Positivists thought of the mind as *merely* a figment. Jones believed that the Positivist's account omitted a crucially important factor – that of *the unity* of the self. He accepted the Positivists' view that sensory experience provides the contents or 'objects' of consciousness, but the self cannot be reduced to a mere 'bundle of impressions', as Hume had once maintained. For, according to Jones, this bundle *has an identity in time.* It is *the same* consciousness, the same 'I', even though the 'objects' of consciousness change with, for instance, changes in our sensory perceptions. It is this conception of the unity of the 'bundle', the unity of 'experience' – as opposed to 'this or that experience' – that makes the mind more than merely a figment.

So just what is this that is more than a figment? Jones proceeded to give a broad analysis of the mind. But it is not a logical analysis of the meaning or grammar of the concept 'mind', but of what readily appears to be something akin to what may be termed 'the anatomy and physiology of mind'. For the paradox is that, although it is denied that the mind is a 'thing', it nevertheless has an anatomy – its 'elements' – and the inter-activity of these elements may be termed their 'physiology'. The choice of the term 'elements' is most unfortunate, for it merely increases the impression that the mind is 'a thing', which is constituted of these elements. These elements are said to be 'consciousness', 'responsiveness', 'the "tendency" to hold on to its past', and the 'propensity' to create 'patterns of behavior'.

The first two of these elements, it is claimed, are known directly through sensory experience, but the last two are 'powers' that are attributed to the mind and account for, in the first instance, memory, and, in the second instance, the self's characteristic behavior. Jones claims that the 'existence' of all four elements is 'conditioned by the constitution of the central nervous system and its workings'. Unfortunately, he does not elucidate further what he meant by 'conditioned' but the strong suggestion is that 'mind' is a function or an activity of the brain and nothing more. He is certainly insistent that introspection, for instance, will not show that the mind is some 'objective psychic operator which is independent of the body'. Such 'a thing' does not exist. But Jones does not identify the mind with the brain, for, evidently, the brain is a physical entity and remains so even when it is inactive or dead.

Much of the article is taken up with the description of the four elements and their inter-relation, with Jones creating his own 'space' by comparing and contrasting his own views with those of the more eminent scholars. The first of these is Samuel Alexander[8] from whom, it is evident, Jones adopted a great deal, particularly in connection with his understanding of those elements called 'consciousness' and 'responsiveness'. Jones, following Alexander, argued that there are different types of 'content' of consciousness – although Alexander preferred to refer, not so much to the 'content of consciousness', but to 'mental objects' or 'objects' and 'mind'. Alexander maintained that the mind was a complex of activities which included not only consciousness of mental objects themselves, but an additional awareness of being conscious of objects, together with a responsiveness to objects – or acts of 'contemplation' – and also an awareness of 'living through' or enjoying this contemplation. However, Jones, although he had considerable admiration for this analysis, argued that Alexander had taken too much for granted. Alexander had not 'proved' that there is an awareness of consciousness itself. Jones maintained that the whole content of consciousness is adequately accounted for in terms of the simple disjunction between that content which is extra-spected through sensory experience, and that content which is 'enjoyed' through mental responses to sensory experience. Consciousness itself is nothing without content – for consciousness is, simply, an awareness of experience, and without experience, an awareness *of some content or other*, there is nothing at all. As Jones expressed it, consciousness is 'experiencing experience'. Or, as he had put it forcefully in his thesis, 'Consciousness draws its own filling from objects. The mind owes its “substance” to objects.’ Jones was aware of the temptation, in this context, of going too far in the direction of Berkeley, and he explicitly did not want to say that the objects *are* their *being* in the mind. But neither did he want to say that they are ‘duplications’ of external objects – for that would invite the whole question of the correctness or exactness of the duplications and, indeed, lead to Hume’s sceptical, solipsistic possibility that if we are merely conscious of this mental content, how is it that we know that there is anything other than the mental in existence at all? Nevertheless, Jones was close to the Hegelians when he used the expression that the mind, not so much ‘confronted’ its objective field, but rather, ‘comprehended it in such a way that it included it’. ‘The mind “includes” its objects by virtue of its awareness of them.’

Jones illustrated his point that there isn’t such a thing as ‘consciousness without content’ by analyzing the notion of sensation. Sensation, he maintained, is twofold. We see, for instance, a particular color, and we are also conscious of the fact that we are seeing it. But take the color away and there is nothing left. There is no awareness of *not* seeing the color, or of *not* seeing anything – an awareness which is empty of content. You cannot introspect simply on consciousness itself, but only on the objects of consciousness. And the belief that it is possible to be conscious of consciousness, simply as a kind of internal mental space was, according to Jones, Alexander’s worst transgression. Alexander’s claim meant that it is possible to contemplate this space as totally internal and without objects at all, and thus, wholly apart and independently from them. It is precisely this kind of view, according to Jones, that the behaviorists rightly attacked. Indeed, William James first made the same kind of attack in his famous article, ‘Does Consciousness Exist?’[9] There James had maintained that the mind is not some ‘aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made’, or something ‘which is believed to stand out and to be felt as a kind of impalpable inner flowing’. On the contrary, James argued, the only ‘materials’ of mind are ‘thoughts in the concrete’. And Jones interpreted this remark in the light of his own thinking, that apart from concrete thoughts there is no mind at all. There is no such thing as an empty mind! Jones further attempted to consolidate his view by showing that to believe in consciousness *simpliciter,* without content, is a consequence of hypostatizing or abstracting its existence from various individual sensory experiences. Jones argued that if we think of the consciousness, say, of ‘blue’ and the consciousness, say, of ‘red’, we are tempted to think that consciousness is a common factor in both experiences, and that while ‘blueness’ and ‘redness’ may be differentiated, consciousness remains the unchanging element in both of the experiences. But, to repeat, apart from the consciousness of either ‘blueness’ or ‘redness’ there is, simply, no consciousness at all.

One cannot help but think that when Jones constantly referred to these ‘contents’ of mind or ‘objects of consciousness’ he principally had in mind what are often called ‘mental images’ – particularly so when referring to ‘objects of consciousness’ which are supposedly derived from sensory experience. Jones, however, never named such ‘objects’ as ‘images’ for, again, I suspect, he was aware that such a term invited the question, ‘What are they images of?’ What he explicitly maintained was that when he used the term ‘object’ in this context, despite his awareness of the term’s unfortunate connotations, he meant merely ‘objects of thought’ and that it was quite irrelevant to enquire as to the genesis of such objects for the purposes of the analysis of mind. We are simply certain, he maintained, that such objects are in our consciousness. What is interesting is that not at any point was Jones, or any of the other empiricists that he frequently alluded to, aware of the logical issue involved – that of the intelligibility of such objects. Even if the highly dubious claim that there is ‘mental content’ or ‘mental images’ is not contested at this juncture, the issue of how this content is *meaningful* is nowhere entertained. Are we to believe that these supposed mental images are capable of informing us of what they are? Does my consciousness of, say, the color red, itself tell me that it is red? The point is that there is no awareness in this analysis at all of the vital role of language in our understanding. As with Locke, language is given the secondary role of being merely a vehicle of communication, for he, together with the empiricists who followed him, wrongly presupposed that ‘ideas’ or ‘objects of the mind’ *themselves* declare to us what they are. In an empiricist analysis, the connection between language and understanding is an external one. Wittgenstein showed this to be a radical error. Without language there is no *understanding* of whatever is seen, whether that be thought of as mental or physical.

Having outlined his philosophy of mind, Jones proceeded with his attempts to resolve two further major issues. First, how does the mind obtain its unity and retain its identity as ‘the same mind’? And, secondly, how does the mind become ‘my mind’ – as opposed to the mind of any other?

Jones formulation of the first of these questions was, ‘How is an awareness of a self created from this material?’ – the material being the ‘experiences’ of both perceiving objects and ‘contemplating’ them, the material which is said to constitute consciousness. First, it was maintained that time is of cardinal importance. All mental experiences are said to be experiences in time, but as individual experiences, they are transitory, they come and go. Hence, Jones’s question was, ‘How are these varied, numerous, if not innumerable, instances of experience bound into a unity in time?’ He answered that the mind has the power to connect the present instant of time with the immediate past, to create a ‘synopsis’ of the present and the immediate past, thus generating a sense of continuity of consciousness. And, through memory, the mind has the ability to recreate the past, even the distant past, into a present experience through the re-creation of images from the past. Thus the ‘empirical present’ of consciousness, as opposed to the mathematical present, may be constituted of a whole range of experiences in time. The mind itself, then, contributes towards a feeling of its own unity, of being ‘the same’ consciousness. But this ‘subjective’ factor, Jones argued, merely *contributes* towards this feeling and, on its own, it is insufficient to give consciousness a thorough sense of unity. In order to achieve this, the mind needs the addition of a ‘further element, which Jones called the ‘objective’ element. This element refers to the ‘object’ or ‘content’ of consciousness, which must retain its own identity throughout the numerous and diverse experiences of it. Jones maintained that only a combination of the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ elements would create a complete sense of unity of consciousness. For although the memory can contribute to a sense of unity, unless *that which is itself remembered* retains its own objective identity, the activity of the memory will be futile. And equally, if there were merely an awareness of the identity of the object, without the synoptic power of the mind, the identity of that object would mean nothing either – for, without memory, the mind would comprehend the same object as a new object from experience to experience.

In Jones’s analysis, a further ‘element’ of consciousness, which has already been alluded to – that of a propensity to react characteristically to those objects presented to the mind – is another contributor to the sense of the unity of consciousness. The constancy and consistency of mental reactions give the impression that this consciousness is one and the same.

Again, how totally inadequate this whole empiricist epistemological enterprise is! However admirable Jones's account may appear to be within the parameters of his empiricism, there is a weakness which is so glaring that it was incredible that it was not seen. For instance, at the heart of these considerations is the notion of identity – that of 'the *same* consciousness' and of 'the *same* object of consciousness'. Yet there is not a single word about the relevant criteria of identity. It is an interesting fact that here there was an attempt to establish the identity of consciousness *before* there was any discussion of what it means to speak of '*this* consciousness' – and that without any reference to '*that* consciousness' or '*other* consciousnesses'. And, similarly, when Jones referred to the identity of the object of consciousness – say, an awareness of 'the same table' – there is no analysis at all of any criterion or criteria of 'sameness' here. Indeed, is it to be assumed that the expression 'the same table' has the same meaning in all contexts? It is never imagined that there are multiple and different criteria of 'the same table', which are applicable in different contexts. And, to apply an earlier criticism again, what does it mean to call an object a 'table' in the first place? Has this not something essentially to do with the role that such an object plays in our lives *together*? Hence, if the *sense* of calling some object a 'table' has to do with public lives and language, how does Jones's constant allusions to what are merely private mental objects contribute to our understanding of what it is to speak of tables, or any other such object?

Or, consider the other aspect of Jones's analysis, the unity and identity of consciousness. Where does the mind get hold of such difficult and abstract concepts such as 'time'? There may be such a phenomenon as animal consciousness of what *we* understand as change – changes in shapes, colors, motion, temperature, and so on. Animals respond causally to such changes. But time, as a function of change, is a complex notion, and is only very gradually grasped by children as they learn a language. Yet, on Jones's analysis, it would appear that the human mind has an innate, intuitive capacity to understand this notion of time and through it bind numerous instances of experiences into a meaningful unity that is called 'the same consciousness'.

But let us persevere with this rather perverse, but typically empiricist analysis. The issue of the unity of the self thus apparently established, Jones turns his attention to the second problem – that of how this consciousness can be labelled ‘*my* consciousness’. But Jones realizes that the sense of ‘self’’ in this context depends on it being contradistinguished from either ‘another’ or ‘others’. In this context, Jones had to confront, what was for him, a real difficulty. For, it will be recalled that, at this time, he held to a quasi-Hegelian idea of consciousness and its content, that ‘the mind “includes” its object by virtue of its awareness of it.’ Hence, consciousness included the whole of the environment as well as our reactions to it, so that whoever or whatever is ‘other’ than the self is ‘internal’ to consciousness itself. Strictly speaking, of course, it is meaningless to speak of what is ‘internal’ to consciousness unless it can be contrasted with something ‘external’ to consciousness. Yet, everything is said to be ‘within consciousness’. How did Jones, then, attempt to resolve the difficulty of both my ‘self’ and other ‘selves’ existing within the same consciousness? Jones reiterated the claim that the whole content of consciousness may be divided into two distinct kinds according to how they are generated. One type of content comes directly through sensory experience, which presents the passive mind with objects that appear *as if* they form an external world, thus creating the impression that that world is totally independent of the mind – totally ‘other’. But, in contrast, the rest of the mind’s content is the product of the mind’s own varied activities, thus creating a sense that this content is not ‘other’ but belongs to that active mind itself. The activities which create this latter content include the responses of the mind to ‘external’ objects, as well as activities such as knowing, believing, remembering, desiring, choosing, and so on. It is with this active ‘part’ of consciousness that ‘self-consciousness’ belongs, while ‘the other’ is identified with that passive ‘area’ or ‘part’ of consciousness. Jones had earlier argued, in this same article, that the whole environment contributes to the content of the self. But this was not seen by him as a contradiction of this new disjunction, but only a paradox, which disappears when it is recognized that without the passive aspect of consciousness there cannot be an active aspect either. Without consciousness of ‘objects’ there cannot be self-consciousness.

However, Jones further maintained that there are two other factors which fortify this sense of ‘my consciousness’ and the ‘otherness’ of a part of the environment within it. First, there is the consciousness that this self is physically ‘embodied’ in a particular body, and thus this self must be ‘other than’ other bodies that are also within the same environment. Secondly, the mind is conscious of ‘other minds’ which are also self-conscious just as ‘my mind’ is and, it was claimed, those ‘other minds’ act as mirrors through which my mind sees itself. Even within Jones's own empiricist framework it appears to me that much more needed to be said about both these factors. What, for instance, determines the sense of 'physical' when everything is 'within consciousness'? And again, if the mind is identified with consciousness, in what sense are there 'other minds' within, say, my consciousness?

Again, Jones underlined his view that this consciousness of 'self' is not a consciousness of some psychic entity to which the name 'self' may be attributed.[10] Introspection demonstrates that such an entity simply does not exist and, if we search for it, we will only be disappointed. Introspection only discloses that there are different kinds of mental contents and that the experiencing of this difference forces the impression that some contents belong to the self more immediately and directly than other contents. Hence 'the self' as an object of self-consciousness is a figment. In this sense, the pronoun 'I' stands for nothing.

The views presented in this article belong to a very different philosophical world from that which has been inherited from Wittgenstein. It would even seem that philosophy itself was a very different discipline at that time and that the accounts given of mind appear to be analogous with say, an account of the anatomy and the physiology of a part of the human body – except, of course, that the mind is not a thing at all! I suppose that there has always been a close connection between empiricism and the logical belief that concepts 'stand for' or refer to some things. So that there is always a danger of thinking of the concept 'mind' as the name of some object. And this impression is deepened by the constant use of such ordinary language expressions as 'in the mind' – as if the logic of this is like speaking of something 'in a box'. Or again, the use of the expression 'the power of the mind' is as if it is logically like, say, 'the power of an engine'. But there is nothing in Jones's article about the logic of the concept 'mind' at all. Indeed, apart from an occasional reference to the use of 'I' there is nothing in this article about concepts as such – except that there is considerable ambiguity when they are used! Even if we were to restrict our considerations to some of those central concepts in the article – 'I', 'self', 'mind', and 'consciousness' – we are left with an uncertainty as to whether or not these concepts are supposed to be synonymous with each other and thus, interchangeable. The paper began with a notion of 'the self' which was 'other than' the body. Then 'the self' was first identified with 'the mind' and then with ‘consciousness’. Some puzzling questions appear to force themselves upon us. For instance, if ‘self’ and ‘mind’ are to be identified, what is the meaning of the possessive pronoun in the expression ‘my mind’? Or again, if ‘self’ and ‘consciousness’ are to be identified, what happens to the ‘self’ when it is not conscious, that is, when a person is either asleep or unconscious? Evidently, it is not possible to say without contradiction ‘I am asleep’ or ‘I am unconscious’. But we only need to modify the tense of the verb to make such meaningful remarks as ‘I was asleep’ or ‘When I will have surgery, I will not feel pain for I will be unconscious’. Certainly, a person does not cease to exist when she sleeps! Furthermore, is it supposed to be understood that the notion of ‘consciousness’, as used by Jones, refers specifically and exclusively to human consciousness? Or are we to infer that this notion includes all forms of consciousness, including animal consciousness? Nowhere is it possible to find in Jones’s paper (or in Jones’s D.Phil. thesis) any attempt to specifically delineate human consciousness in contrast to any other possible forms of consciousness. That animals, for instance, to a greater or lesser degree, are conscious of their surroundings is an indubitable fact, and, the more complex and developed they are, it may be assumed that they are that much closer to human consciousness. And I suspect that had Jones been asked at this stage in his philosophical development about the difference between animal and human consciousness he may have essayed to reply in terms of a distinction between consciousness itself and self-consciousness and he would have maintained that an animal has consciousness but not self-consciousness. It is interesting that Jones did, at one point in his paper, refer to what he termed ‘a mature consciousness’ and he maintained that self-consciousness is closely connected with this maturity – so that, say, infants are somewhat devoid of it. However, had Jones reflected further on the nature of self-consciousness, and how this is directly connected with our linguistic and conceptual ability, particularly our mastery of personal pronouns, he would have seen that the distinction between animal consciousness and human consciousness is also connected with the fact that human beings are language-users while animals are not. Not only does ‘mature’ consciousness depend on language, but self-awareness itself, as opposed to animal awareness, is conceptually based. An infant’s consciousness of its environment may be akin to that of an animal. But as the child learns a language, all its consciousness becomes conceptually determined: the growing child will see everything through the language that is being learnt. This means that its consciousness ceases to be like that of an animal. It may be said that, say, a dog can ‘see’ precisely the same objects that I am now looking at. It can see the shapes, colors, sense smells, feel hardness and softness, and so on, and is capable of reacting to them. But if it is a book that I am looking at, the dog does not see a *book* – for to see a book is to understand the concept ‘book’, to know how this word is used in the language. And, *a fortiori,* the animal cannot see that it is a novel that I have in my hand – as opposed to any other form of literature. Even though it is quite simple for a child, as a language-user, to understand such a distinction between forms of literature, the ability to do so is wholly outside what we understand as ‘animal consciousness’. Self-consciousness is a genre of human consciousness and is similarly determined by language.

Space will not permit us to go through the various stages of the changes in Jones’s empiricist position. However, it is worth noting that he published two papers in English on our knowledge of other minds in the early fifties,[11] immediately before arriving at Swansea, and two additional papers in the second part of the same decade.[12] But even the two later contributions do not show that Swansea philosophy had yet had an impact on Jones. The only noteworthy point that should be made is that, in these two later papers, Jones used for the first time Wittgenstein’s suggestion that there are two distinct meanings to the personal pronoun ‘I’. This dichotomous meaning of ‘I’ was employed by Jones to confirm his view that there is both a public and a private self, and this remained a permanent feature of Jones’s later writings. An attempt will be made to explore this distinction and to expose the confusion which arose partly as a result of its adoption – a confusion from which Jones never fully extricated himself.

IV

Jones’s final thoughts on these matters published in English, were expressed in his Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society in 1967 in a paper entitled, ‘How do I know who I am?’[13] A year later, he wrote and read what was to be his very last paper, and in Welsh. It was entitled, ‘*Yr Hunan a’r Hunan Arall’* (‘The Self and the Other Self’).[14] The extent to which Jones was influenced by his Swansea colleagues, including Rhees, Holland, Phillips and Dilman (who had replaced Winch), is evidenced by these two papers. The content of his English language paper is well known and accessible to most. But a summary of it will not be inapt, partly in order to judge how far Jones had moved away from his earlier position.

Jones began his treatment of the notion of personal identity in this address with an account of his disagreement with Strawson's analysis of the concept 'person' in the book, *Individuals.*[15] But, in the initial passage of the paper, Jones made a dual confession. First, that it was his intention in this paper 'to contest the view that consciousness . . . taken to refer to something bodiless, is somehow, inherently self-identifying'[16] and, secondly, in a statement which stands in complete contradistinction with his previous claims, he stated, 'It seems indisputable . . . that what I am directly surrounded by in the human world are *people*.'[17] This second admission appears to be a complete *volte-face* on Jones's part and here we have a clear indication of the influence of Swansea philosophy on Jones's thinking. For a cardinal error of modern philosophy, since Descartes, is to presuppose that 'the given' – the correct point of departure for any philosophical inquiry – is not an isolated 'self' or 'mind' but, as Wittgenstein once put it, 'What has to be accepted, the given, is . . . *forms of life.*'[18] 'Forms of life' are human practices or ways of carrying on, and it is through learning how the language of any practice is used, and (according to Rhees, as opposed to Wittgenstein)[19] how that language is related to other practices and other uses of language, that any particular practice is understood. The implication of this is that even the practice of self-referring is not possible in isolation, or independently from other uses of language, including, most significantly, the language of referring to others. So Jones, instead of beginning his inquiry by looking 'inwards' to discover some elusive 'self', began by looking 'outwards' with the premise that he is surrounded by a human world of persons. Hence, it is possible to conclude that Jones had assimilated a central plank of Swansea philosophy. But whether or not he clearly understood the reasons for this cardinal truth remains doubtful.

We do not have to read much further into the article before we become increasingly perplexed by Jones's insistence on incorporating into his new thinking elements which appear to belong to his empiricism. Strawson had argued that if the Cartesian dichotomy were adopted, then, to use Jones's phrase, 'I am no longer able to know who I am.' For, as Strawson stated, "I have no idea of 'different, distinguishable, identifiable . . . consciousness.'"[20] Indeed, Strawson further argued for what he called the 'primitiveness of the concept of a person' which meant, as Jones put it, that 'the concept of a person cannot be resolved into two logically more primitive concepts – the concept of a particular human body and that of a “pure individual consciousness” located in the body.’[21] In other words, according to Strawson, when we refer to persons we are referring to individuals to which ‘*both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics . . . are equally applicable.’[22] This is what we mean by a ‘person’ and Jones agreed with Strawson’s analysis – at least provisionally.

Then Jones raised a possible objection to the concept of a person being called ‘primitive’ on the grounds that the supposed intention for doing so was ‘to block the admission of a complication of structure in human beings’.[23] It is this talk of ‘structure’ that is the root of much confusion in Jones, for it appears as if he is concerned again, not with the *concept* of ‘self’, but with its anatomy. He expressed his dissatisfaction with Strawson’s apparent contradictory conclusion that we have to ‘acknowledge that there is a kind of predicate’ (labelled, ‘P-predicates’ by Strawson, and which refer to ‘states of consciousness’) ‘which is unambiguously and adequately ascribable *both* on the basis of observation of the subject *and* not on this basis.’[24] That is, we ascribe P-predicates to others on the basis of observation, and the same P-predicates to ourselves ‘not on this basis’ – simply because it is we ourselves who are the subjects of these predicates. We do not say *on the basis of observation* that we ourselves are, say, in pain or that we are happy. Jones maintained that this difference should not be glossed over, and he insisted that the reason for this ‘*radical* asymmetry’ must lie ‘in the structure of persons’. Hence, Jones felt it necessary to embark upon a re-examination of this metaphysical structure.

Jones relied a great deal on Wittgensteinian insights as he undertook this task. But it is significant that they were not primarily those of the later Wittgenstein, but the Wittgenstein of the *Notebooks,* the *Tractatus,* the transitional work known as the *Blue Book,* and the lectures on which Moore reported. In other words, we are taken back to the works of the early Wittgenstein who had been deeply influenced by Schopenhauer and the notion of the world as ‘an idea of mine’ – an idea which, I suggest, would have been wholly unacceptable to the later Wittgenstein. Jones repeated here what he had maintained in the two late 1950’s papers alluded to above, that the ‘I’ is used in two different senses. First, it is used to denote the person who utters the pronoun ‘I’, and, in such a context, it is used in contrast with other personal pronouns. Hence, this ‘I’ is ‘on a level with other people’. Secondly, the ‘I’ is used in a ‘grammatical position’ that is not on the level with other people – where ‘the “I” does not denote a possessor’ and it is ‘without neighbors’. Here, it is alleged, ‘I’ and ‘consciousness’ are ‘equivalent’. And because the ‘I’ is neighborless, there cannot be self-knowledge – for there is nothing with which the ‘I’ stands in contradistinction. Evidently, if this were the case, trying to say anything more about this ‘I’ would lead to all sorts of difficulties. It would be attempting to say the unsayable – and Jones was plainly aware of this difficulty. Hence, if further clarification were asked for about this ‘I’ – for instance, ‘What is it?’ – we are devoid of language that can give expression to any possible answer. Even if we say ‘consciousness’ we want to ask, ‘“Consciousness” – as opposed to what?’ Jones, however, despite his awareness that he is up some conceptual *cul-de-sac* called ‘solipsism’, suggested that the closest expression to the meaning of this ‘I’ would be ‘the world’s being there.’[25] But again what does the expression ‘the world’ signify in this context? ‘The world’ – as opposed to what? And, significantly, it is not ‘my world’ but ‘the world’, for, as Jones saw, to call that world ‘my world’ would be to establish an identity between consciousness and myself – and through the use of the possessive pronoun ‘my’, bring this consciousness back to the public level. This leads to the remarks, borrowed from the *Tractatus*, about death – where it is said that ‘at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end’.[26] Jones bent over backwards to avoid the use of the plain and normal expression ‘my death’ – that death that will be the end my world – simply because he wanted to keep this self away from the public level. For this is a solipsistic ‘I’ that is not part of the world, but co-extensive with it and, hence, this world and ‘I’ will end together. The public world will, in contrast, go on as it always has.

But do we need to postulate this solipsistic, ‘neighborless self’ at all? Did Jones succeed in his objective in this context of answering Strawson’s paradox? It would be most strange if a recourse to some nebulous metaphysical ‘I’ – which, in this analysis isn’t an ‘I’ at all – could resolve anything! Had Jones been a thoroughgoing Wittgensteinian, he would not have been thinking of ‘persons’ in terms of two definitive kinds of predicates at all, as Strawson did. There are confusions here, which arose from Jones’s failure to grasp a central aspect of the later Wittgensteinian perspective. He did not realize that the kind of account which Strawson was offering was logically essentialist in character. A principal and constant theme of the *In-*

vestigations is its criticisms of the logical essentialist account of language – the kind of account given in the *Tractatus*. In the *Investigations* it is insisted that the method of seeking all-embracing definitions of concepts is, in general, misleading and confused – for it is wrongly presupposed that the nature of language is formal. The notion of a 'game' is taken to demonstrate the fluid, informal character of language – for no single definition will cover the multifarious uses of this notion. And so it is with the concept of a 'person'. Strawson attempted to provide us with a fixed definition of what is a 'person' and Jones took the bait and attempted to raise objections and modify this essentialist definition. This was already to stray from Wittgenstein's later way of thinking.

Strawson had maintained that the concept of a person refers to an entity to which two kinds of predicates are equally attributable. Not only are we within the boundary of essentialism, but also within a dichotomous grammatical realm – that of two kinds of predicates. But why only two and *these* two in particular? By simply thinking in such terms we see that the restrictive metaphysical vision and philosophical methodology that they had inherited blinkered both Strawson and Jones. They were preoccupied with a metaphysical conception of personhood and were attempting to resolve and escape from Cartesian dualism. So in Jones's paper, we are back to an analysis of the 'self', the individual person. What has suddenly happened to the significance of his initial remark that what he is surrounded by are people? This appeared to convey that this was now his point of departure, something clearly understood and accepted, that 'the given' is a world in which we are surrounded by people. But there is a sudden reversal: we must ask the question, and formulate a fixed definition, of what these things that surround us really are!

It is a question which is asked *in vacuo*. It was not a matter of perplexity when it was the claimed that we belong to a world in which we are surrounded by people. There is no room for any perplexity here, for we live our daily lives with our families, amongst our neighbors, and we work with our colleagues, and so on. And in contexts such as these we should not be and never are perplexed when we see human beings. From childhood we have learnt how to use this concept, and whenever we see a human being it is not possible for us, who understand the concept, not to see that human being as a person. This does not mean, however, that we are never perplexed by the question of what it means to be a person. But we need special contexts, other than pseudo-philosophical ones, to make this perplexity genuine.

‘But surely your recognition of a human being depends on, or will readily conform with, the kind of definition that Strawson provided!’ Of course, our recognition of a human being is certainly connected with the fact that she has a body. We, I suggest, would not know what it would mean to speak of myself, or any other human being, if I, or any other human being, did not have a body. This is a grammatical assertion. The concept of ‘person’ and ‘body’ are logically inseparable. If there is no life in the body, this means that the person is dead. Superficial grammar, however, can be misleading, and the use of the expression ‘my body’ suggests that the possessive pronoun denotes a possessor, which is other than the body. But ‘my car’ and even ‘my leg’ have a different depth grammar from ‘my body’. I can sell my car and lose my leg. But I cannot, logically, lose my body. A philosophical confusion arises in this context when the ‘my’ is said to denote something invisible, within the body, which is ‘other than’ – although connected with – the body, and is represented in language by the ‘I’. ‘I am in pain. ‘I am happy.’ ‘I made the decision.’ ‘I remember.’ And so on – and here this ‘I’, it is alleged, is not the body but, ‘the real self’. It is true, of course, that such predications are central to the character of what it is to be a human being, that human beings can think, feel grief, have hopes and disappointments, and so on. But it is the metaphysical construct of the ‘self’ based on these predications that is problematic. It seems to me that such a construction is an idle wheel and wholly dispensable. For in order to understand human activities and behavior we have only to have recourse to the fact that we are language-users. And, as the intelligibility of language is grounded in our social lives and practices, whatever alleged inward, mental activities, or mental imaging, or even physiological activities that may go on within the body when we act, or think, or are happy, are of no philosophical relevance whatsoever. Everything that belongs to the category of the logical, or that of intelligibility, is public. When we see a human being, with some exceptions or in some exceptional circumstances, we know that that being is capable of conversation. We can talk with her, discuss issues, ask her all sorts of questions, and so on. A human being has such capacities – and the recognition of these capacities is all that is necessary to illuminate the whole of the human world. It is not any inward, solipsistic self, or any supposed mental activity that is ‘my world’ and co-extensive with it, but rather it is a shared public language that makes the world intelligible to each individual. It appears to me that one of the few acceptable assertions in the *Tractatus* is *'The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world',[27] and indeed, the limits of my world mean the limits of my language. Everything that is part of my world is intelligible through language – which is shared with other persons.

But let us examine more closely the nature of the disagreement between Strawson and Jones in their equally essentialist accounts of what it is to be a person. Both agree that we attribute two, and only two, different kinds of predicates to persons – physical and mental. What does this expression 'different kinds of predicates' mean? Both Strawson and Jones simply meant by this that some predicates refer to what is observable and public while others refer to what is not observable and 'private'. But the question arises: Does the recognition of the different 'depth-grammar'of the predicates themselves provide legitimate grounds for inferring that a 'person' is 'structured' is some definitive way? It appears that both Strawson and Jones believe that that is the case.

What does it mean to speak of 'the depth-grammar' of concepts? Well, partly, that understanding such a grammar will mean that we become more aware of what it makes sense to say or ask, and not say or ask, in conjunction with these predicates. Color predicates, for instance, are observable and consequently, they may be defined ostensively. But Strawson's P-predicates are not of this kind. I may see that a person is in pain. But I cannot see the pain. The concept 'pain' does not have that kind of depth-grammar. Now why should the recognition of the different depth-grammar of concepts lead to a concept of 'a person' as something that is 'structured' in a particular way? After all, most human beings have a clear notion of what a person is – they know how to use this concept – although, in all probability, they have never heard of the *philosophical* notion of 'depth-grammar'. An awareness of depth-grammar will assist us to avoid and/or clear some conceptual confusions. But we do not learn what is meant by 'person' by learning the depth-grammar of certain predicates – no more than we learn our mother tongue (as opposed to a second or third language) by learning rules of grammar! Rather, it is by learning our mother tongue that we come to an understanding of our world, including what it means to be a person. A child soon learns to recognize clear differences between objects – between the animate and the inanimate, between all sorts of creatures and persons. It is only much later, if at all, that the child learns any grammar. But are we to infer that a person who has no knowledge of depth-grammar has no clear conception of what it is to be a person? Are we to infer that because of our understanding of the depth-grammar of certain predicates that any other creature, say, a dog that is in pain, is 'structured' in some 'mental' way? How does the move from the recognition that, say, 'pain' does not 'stand for' anything visible, lead to a belief in a certain 'structure' that belongs to persons, and, presumably, only to persons?

Yet it seems that Jones made such inferences. Not only do predicates of different depth-grammar affect the concept person, but also these predicates are themselves indicative of 'the structure' of a person. I have little or no notion whatsoever of what Jones meant by 'structure' here or what role such a structure is supposed to have. 'She is a delightful child.' What 'structure' corresponds to 'delightful'? 'She is a wonderful person, always joyful, always generous.' All I understand by the use of such predicates is that a certain bearer of a name, that person, behaves, acts and reacts in certain spiritually and morally uplifting ways. What has the notion of 'structure' to do with the logic of these predications? Of course, I understand that I need 'structures' like legs to walk on, and a ''structure' like an ear to hear. But what are the 'structures' that belong to a delightful person? 'But her delightful personality is something mental!' Mental? Her warmth was in her embrace, the smile was on her face and the twinkle was in her eye! Whose engine is it that's idling!

What does it mean to say that I am an individual person? Well, any answer must be logically connected with the context in which the question is asked. But we can imagine claims being made about having one's own life, responsibilities, thoughts, decisions, aims, hopes, griefs, pains, and so on. Yes, I have my own thoughts and I *may* keep them to myself. But they are not logically private. For the intelligibility of my thoughts depends on a shared language. I could not have meaningful thoughts that I, logically, could not share with others. For I have no medium of thought other than the language that I have and this is a shared public commodity. 'This may be the case with thoughts but, logically, no one can have my pain!' But what does this claim amount to? If it simply means that because the pain is in my leg you cannot have it, for my leg is my leg and not yours – there is no problem. For part of what it normally means to be myself as a person is that I have a body of which legs are a part. But, of course, we both can have the same pain. You cannot have my toothache and I cannot have your toothache, but we both can have toothache. The way we speak and understand our pains is shared, is public. Our understanding of pain depends on language in the same way as do our thoughts.

In the immediate context of Jones's criticism of Strawson, we may ask what is meant exactly by 'observation' in the expression used by both Jones and Strawson that we ascribe P-predicates to others 'on the basis of observation'. Is this observation to be understood in the way that empiricists normally employ this term – that is, in the sense that every observation is *per se* intelligible without reference to any conceptual apparatus? Or is the seeing here conceptually determined, as a Wittgensteinian would argue? I suspect that in Jones's case it is the former. And this is why he states that 'I *know* that I am in pain.' This knowledge is supposed to be 'direct' as it is *my* pain. But is human knowledge of the experience of pain like that of an animal? A dog may be said to be in pain. The dog is in pain. The dog feels the pain. But it does not know that it is *pain.* 'Pain' is a concept in our language. And when we say that Smith is in pain our observation is conceptually determined. To say that we know that Smith is in pain is to say that we understand that he is in pain. And we apply the same public criteria for the use of these concepts when we apply them to Smith as we do to ourselves. When we tell others, when it is not already evident to them, that 'I have pain', this expression is intelligible to them because these words are as much part of their language as they are of the language of whosoever utters them. It seems to me that if Jones had fully appreciated this he would not have taken a metaphysical road. If he were to have examined our uses of such concepts as 'know' and 'pain' it would have become evident to him that we do not use the word 'know' in conjunction with 'pain' when we refer to ourselves. Under what circumstances would it make sense to say that 'I do not know that I am in pain?' And if that is not intelligible, neither is the statement 'I know that I am in pain.' All we say is, 'I have a pain.' Or 'I am in pain.'

However, it is intelligible to say something like 'I do not know if I have toothache.' This is not because I am unaware of a pain, but of whether or not I am using the right concept in this context. The pain might not be a toothache but a pain caused by, say, an abscess or a gumboil.

The fact that some experiences are personal or private is no justification for embracing dualism. The fact that the pain is mine is no grounds for saying that the ‘I’ is to be defined as the subject of two different kinds of predicates. What the concept of ‘person’ means will largely be determined by a context in which it makes sense to question what it means to be a person. And, similarly, the significance of the question of who I am will depend on the context in which it is asked. In most instances, the answer that will be given will be the respondent’s name. ‘I’ can almost *always* be substituted by my name – ‘W. L. G.’. I am, in almost all instances, a bearer of a name. And it is an interesting observation that, without exception, all children learn and know their names before they master the personal or possessive pronouns. Learning their names is one of the first tasks given to children when they begin to learn a language. The child is given a name. The child will come to know herself by that name. There is nothing private about this. Our identity as individuals is determined in a social context – and not through any essentially private introspective procedure, as Jones contended.

Jones’s final word on these matters was published in his Welsh-language article in *Efrydiau Athronyddol.*[28] In my view, there is no further advance in a Wittgensteinian direction made in this paper. There were certain fundamental philosophical perceptions that Jones still had not grasped sufficiently thoroughly to rid himself wholly of his particular empiricist traits. This special volume of *Efrydiau Athronyddol* was in honour of R. I. Aaron who was about to retire from the Chair of Philosophy at Aberystwyth after thirty-seven years and also from his work as editor of this same Welsh-language journal after thirty years. Hence, it was inevitable that Jones should have introduced his subject in relation to what Aaron himself has published on the same topic. And in 1944, Aaron published in the journal *Philosophy,* a paper entitled, ‘Our Knowledge of One Another’.[29] This paper was a classical defence of Mill’s doctrine of analogy. Although Aaron claimed that solipsism is a nonsense and that, in relation to our knowledge of others, ‘we do in fact feel quite certain about such knowledge and cannot bring ourselves to doubt it’,[30] he nevertheless maintained that our knowledge of others is ‘indirect’ and, hence, different from the ‘direct’ knowledge that we have of ourselves. ‘That which is generally taken to be the direct element in the process of knowing one’s own self does not appear to be the direct element in one’s knowledge of another. One does not introspect another’s mind. There is no extra-spection.’[31]

Jones's criticisms of Aaron's remark could not be improved upon. He clearly demonstrated that the whole doctrine of analogy presupposes the 'absurdity' of solipsism – from which an inference must be made to establish the reality of other minds. But in a solipsistic state nothing is known – not even a knowledge of who or what I am myself. Hence, the doctrine of analogy is said to be a confused piece of reasoning which attempts to resolve a problem that is created by the confused and meaningless solipsistic assumption that, as a conscious being, I know myself directly, and that from this knowledge I need to build an inferential bridge to a knowledge of others. Mill's reference to other human beings as 'walking and speaking figures' is not false but meaningless. If there is a problem with our knowledge of one another then we must either solve or dissolve the problem by looking in an entirely different direction. And this is what Jones did. He underlined the fact that I come to know who I am through being part of a human community – a community of beings like myself and not a community of automata as Mill had thought. Here Jones thoroughly reflected the standpoint of the Swansea school.

But then, once more, Jones developed the argument in a strange way, along the lines of his earlier presidential address. It is an account which is again essentialist in character and dualistic in substance. He maintained that we ascribe to persons two different kinds of predicates – physical and psychological. In order to ascribe these predicates properly, we must be able to 'pick out' the appropriate kind of subjects for them – something that, as Jones correctly points out, would be totally impossible from a solipsistic position. He repeated his claim that 'pure consciousness', that is 'consciousness itself turning into itself', is 'intrinsically solipsistic'. Nevertheless Jones still carried on, in the immediate context, to make assertions about such a 'pure consciousness' as if it were real:

> It does not know who it is. . . . It will be, to itself, a unique example of its kind. . . . Experiences will be occurring, to be sure, within the consciousness, but these cannot be attributed to it. . . . Hence, the pure consciousness has no neighbors. . . . 'I' am not this 'pure consciousness'. . . . I am 'this' and when saying 'this', I find myself pointing *at my body.* Thus it would be more correct to say that I – 'this' – is within my consciousness than that consciousness, as some figmentary stuff is within me. For consciousness is a scene – the whole panorama that opens before me the whole time that I am awake. In a word, 'that

> there is a world' is my consciousness – not, to be sure, the world that was there before me and will be there after me, but 'the world that will end at death'.[32]

So Jones clung to this notion of 'pure consciousness'. And then he proceeded to argue, just as he had done in the previous paper, that a prerequisite of knowing myself at all is to know myself as a bodily presence – as my companions are also bodily presences. This is on the level of 'having neighbors' but, on the other level, 'the level of "pure consciousness"', I have no neighbors. Jones adds, 'Within my subjectivity, that is, on the level of "pure consciousness" I have no neighbors. And on this level *solipsism is true.*'[33] How can solipsism be said, by the same author and in the same paper, to be both a nonsense and true? It is quite clear that Jones was simply unable to speak of 'person' without introducing this dichotomy of a private inner self and a public outer self. And, even at this late juncture in his life, Jones admits that 'one good aspect of the analogy argument is that it understands that it is as a bodily presence that my fellow-man first comes into my experience'.[34] So Mill's 'walking and speaking figures' are replaced by 'bodily presences'. Jones adds:

> This means that one 'requirement' for a neighborhood of companions is that I know *myself* as another example of the same kind of thing my fellow-man is, that is, as a behaving bodily presence. And the other side of the requirement is that I must know *my fellow-man* as another example of the same kind as myself, that is as a bodily presence that is *also the subject of experiences.*[35]

These are crucial assertions which take us again to the core of the weakness in Jones's position and which confirm the suspicion that strong elements of empiricism remain in his thinking. We simply need to ask the question: How is he able to 'pick out' himself as a 'bodily presence', and hence *know* of himself *as a bodily presence* and recognize others as similar 'bodily presences'? Is not this again an empiricist 'picking out' – for there is no mention of any recourse to the learning and using of language? And again, how is he to know himself and/or others as 'subjects of experiences'? It is strikingly clear that what is missing in this whole analysis is any reference to language and to its fundamental role in our knowing or understanding anything at all. And, on the basis of this omission, it is proper to conclude that the rest of Jones's paper will not do either, for Jones throughout placed the cart before the horse. In his analysis, observation comes first. Through observation we 'pick out' those objects to which it is appropriate to ascribe physical and psychological predicates. But where do these predicates come from except from language? It is through the understanding gained through language – in this context, by learning the concept of 'person' – that we know what it makes sense and doesn't make sense to say about them. Language determines what we see or what we see is understood through the language that is used. It appears that, right to the very end, Jones failed to grasp the essential internal connection between language and understanding and his constant references to 'picking out' reflect a principal error in empiricism – that of severing observation from that which makes any observation meaningful.

It was earlier suggested that sometimes we might be puzzled about the application of the concept of 'person'. But, normally, it is equally clear why this is the case and the reasons for the perplexity are not philosophical. We may ask if a fetus is a person or whether, tragically, a long-term sufferer from senile dementia is still a person. We are asking these questions because we are morally puzzled about how we should deal with them. And this underlines how central the concept of a person is in moral discourse. But in such contexts as these, instead of asking the question 'What is a person?' *in vacuo,* as Jones and other metaphysicians did, it is the context itself which makes our questioning intelligible. We are often examining, not the heart of the concept of a person, but its periphery and whether certain 'human beings' or potential human beings are within or outside this boundary. Yet often, particularly in medical ethics, the traditional metaphysical, dichotomous conception of a person, as body and mind, may have a profound effect on moral judgements. For both fetuses and sufferers of permanent loss of memory are evidently bodies – but, in the one case, they are said to have no 'mind' as yet, or, in the second instance, they are said to have lost it.

This is different from, but related to, the fact that when human beings are, or have been, most dreadfully mistreated by their fellow human beings – say through the institution of slavery, or as the Jews were treated during the Holocaust – a precondition for such maltreatment was to exclude such persons entirely from the concept of personhood. They are, or were to be thought to be by their malefactors, somehow sub-human. The Greeks, for instance, called slaves '*soma*' (bodies), suggesting that slaves were merely objects, and not persons at all. This is again indicative of the role which the concept of 'person' has in the language of morality.

The phenomenological claim that human beings are language-users would appear to rule out certain traditional ways of speaking. ‘Surely’, it could be contested, ‘we are more than language-users. Human beings have souls. They have spirits too.’ But, again, the issue is: what does it mean to speak of human beings as 'souls’ or as ‘spirits’? Part of the problem arises when we think of concepts such as ‘mind’, ‘soul’, and ‘spirit’ as words which denote some ‘thing’ or other. This is a philosophical temptation, which is to be resisted. Yet some of us are less susceptible to such a temptation. In my mother tongue of Welsh, the word for ‘mind’ (‘meddwl’) hardly has a use as a noun at all, but merely as a verb-noun (‘meddylu’), which, translated, simply means ‘thinking’. And when we think, the words are in our mouths, but we do not utter them. Thinking is the silent use of language. Even when it is said that ‘I worked out the sum in my head’, what is meant is that it was not worked out with pen and paper.

A failure to recognize the depth-grammar of certain concepts has led to enormous confusion particularly when such concepts play a central role in certain forms of understanding and practices – such as the moral and the religious. When we talk of souls, we do not refer to any thing *within* a person. We are speaking of persons. ‘She is a generous old soul.’ This is, again, a moral description. ‘He is a soul-less creature.’ This is, too, a moral judgement, which claims that the person is devoid of such feelings as sympathy and compassion. And, generally speaking, to speak of persons as souls is to speak of their *moral* character. In some other contexts, such as a religious context, ‘soul’ may simply mean ‘life’. ‘Today thy soul will be taken from thee.’ That is, today you are going to die.

And similarly, to speak of ‘spirit’ is to speak of a person’s spirituality, and not necessarily or exclusively in religious terms. Religion is primarily, of course, the main vehicle for the expression of spirituality. But the aesthetic and whatever is good and beautiful – those things in life, which we find most uplifting or are inspirational to the ‘spirit’ – are also spiritual channels. Among these is love, in its various forms, and it is little wonder that this concept is at the heart of some religions. There are, of course, equally secular uses of the concept of spirit. We speak of the depressed person as being ‘low in spirit’. We speak of the ‘*esprit de corps’* and of ‘the spirit of the age’. We are not tempted in any of these cases to believe that we are referring to some non-material innate entity called ‘spirit’. We are speaking of human responses to circumstances – of joy and happiness, sorrow and grief. And, in religion specifically, we are speaking of the joy and wonder of being, of a person's response to life itself.

V

Jones was a deeply religious person and throughout his professional life he wrestled with those religious beliefs which were taught to him as a child and which now appeared to conflict with his philosophical beliefs. Again, he never satisfactorily resolved this tension. Indeed, he constantly modified his theological position and allowed himself to be unduly influenced by others whose views happened to be in vogue. In an early contribution to a Welsh language volume entitled *Credaf* ('I Believe')[36] in which several Welsh scholars gave an account of their religious beliefs, Jones declared his admiration for Marxism. This flirtation with Marxism was, however, short-lived. Logical Positivism's criticisms of metaphysical beliefs applied equally to Marx's metaphysical materialism, and it was the new Positivism that was now fashionable. And, as indicated above, Jones attempted in his inaugural lecture to interpret religious beliefs in Positivistic terms. Soon the influence of Positivism waned and by the early 1960s the name of Paul Tillich was constantly on the lips of many theologians. Jones became an admirer of the so-called 'death of God theology' and he wrote a great deal in the Welsh language on these matters. By this time Phillips was beginning to flourish and he made poignant criticism of Tillich – criticisms which Jones accepted as valid. He was again in some religious wilderness. The religious void was largely filled by some of the ideas of Simone Weil and it is with these that he was preoccupied during the last years of his life. Jones only published one book during the whole of his academic life and that was just before his death. It is entitled *Ac Onide* (*And, If Not*).[37] It is a book of sermons (Jones was a celebrated preacher, particularly among the Welsh Presbyterians – although at one time he was the subject of unsuccessful excommunication proceedings against him by his church for his heterodox religious views) and addresses to various groups, particularly *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* (The Welsh Language Society – a militant group of protesters formed in an attempt to save the Welsh language from total extinction). *Ac Onide* is still widely acclaimed by Welsh readers and it is in this volume that Jones's religious views are principally found. But in this volume too, the influence of the later Wittgenstein is not at all clear. Phillips published two English-language contributions to the philosophy of religion by Jones and evidently Phillips thought highly of these.[38] One of these contributions is a sermon preached by Jones and it owes more to the *Tractatus* and the distinction between 'how the world is' and 'that it is'[39] than to anything that belonged to the later Wittgenstein. Personally, I find this *Tractatus* dichotomy completely irreconcilable with anything that I recognize as orthodox Christian doctrine.

This whole, relatively negative assessment of Jones's achievements is further enforced through personal knowledge. A most disappointing aspect of Jones's work is the well-established fact that when teaching the honors philosophy of religion course at Swansea, he did not substantially change the content of his own notes throughout the whole period – despite the considerable criticism made of his approach by his own students in discussions and essays. Phillips himself followed this course as a student in the mid-fifties. It famously began with Jones attempting to give 'a scientific account on the nature of religious belief' in which he sympathetically examined various anthropological and psychological explanations for religious belief. Jones was not aware of the reductive character of these theories. It was the same, unmodified course that I followed in the early 1960s – and so did others later in that decade. The whole course was based on empiricist premises with Jones largely concerned with the logical nature of the move from the world to God – whether it was a matter of 'seeing' or 'intuiting' the 'necessity of God's existence' (as his fellow Welsh-philosopher friend, Prof. H. D. Lewis would have it) or a matter of a 'disclosure situation' such as 'the ice breaking' or 'the penny dropping' as late Prof. I. Ramsey maintained. Jones's own preferred option was that of the Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith' and Unamuno's belief that it is man's passionate desire to save the world from possible total meaninglessness that is at the root of religious faith. To give such significance to passion in religion went with his emotivist interpretation of it. However, it is clear that Jones's attempted solution to what was perceived as the 'problem of God's existence' is to be regarded as a pseudo-solution to a pseudo-problem that was based on empirical presuppositions. In the language of faith, the world is already God's world, and within faith the world is not in any sense a religiously neutral phenomenon from which one infers 'the existence of some deity' – whatever this religiously alien expression is supposed to mean!

Jones also taught the main modern History of Philosophy honors course. He excelled as a teacher. And Locke was a great favorite of his. He expounded Locke's famous *Essay,* particularly Book II, with gusto. Then he would arrive at Book IV. How could Locke be so inconsistent in his empiricism? How could he so be so clear as to the grounds of knowledge in Book II and then speak in such lofty terms of mathematical knowledge in Book IV? Jones argued that Locke was unaware of the deep Rationalist traits of thought in his thinking. Even a central distinction made by Locke between nominal and real essences pointed to rationalist presuppositions. These were the causes of inconsistencies in Locke. Jones, however, was not unsympathetic with Locke. Locke's achievements were remarkable when we realize how revolutionary they were at the time. It is an analogous sympathy that I feel for Jones himself. He came to Swansea as one steeped in empiricism. In time he recognized that empiricism was a mistake. He did his utmost to rescue himself from it and embrace the new perspective. He travelled far on this road but, in my view, he never reached the point where it could be said of him that he actually pushed the frontier further on. Indeed, it can hardly be said that he himself reached that frontier.

NOTES

[1] *John Locke* (Oxford: 1937, first appeared in the 'Leaders of Philosophy Series').

[2] *Religion as True Myth* (Swansea, 1953).

[3] A draft version of this M.A. thesis, from which the quotations are taken, is kept at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

[4] Oxford, 1901.

[5] Op. cit.

[6] A draft version of this D.Phil. thesis from which the quotations are taken, is kept at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

[7] '*Sylwadau ar Broblem Natur Hunan*' ('Observations on the Problem of the Nature of Self'), *Efrydiau Athronyddol,* Vol. 1 (1938), University of Wales Press, pp. 42-71.

[8] Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity,* 2 vols. (London, 1920).

[9] *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York, 1912).

[10] '*Sylwadau ar Broblem Natur Hunan*', p. 57.

[11] 'The Self in Sensory Cognition', *Mind* (January, 1950) and 'Our Knowledge of Other Persons', *Philosophy* (April, 1950).

[12] 'Self-Knowledge', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. xxx (1956) and 'The Two Contexts of Mental Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* Vol. lix (1958/9).

[13] *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* Supp. Vol. (1967).

[14] *Efrydiau Athronyddol,* Vol. xxxii (1969), pp. 43-57.
[15] London, 1959.
[16] *'Yr Hunan a'r Hunan Arall'* ('The Self and the Other Self'), p. 1.
[17] Ibid., p. 2.
[18] *Philosophical Investigations,* tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1958), p. 226.
[19] See Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse,* ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge, 1998). One of Rhees's main theses in this volume is that Wittgenstein was mistaken in thinking that any 'language-game' could be understood without reference to other human practices.
[20] *Individuals*, p. 102.
[21] *'Yr Hunan a'r Hunan Arall'* ('The Self and the Other Self'), p. 4.
[22] Ibid., p. 5.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Individuals* (London,1959), p. 102.
[25] Op. cit., p. 9.
[26] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* tr. D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinnes (London, 1961), 6.4311.
[27] Ibid., 5.6.
[28] *'Yr Hunan a'r Hunan Arall'.*
[29] Vol. 19, pp. 63-75.
[30] *'Yr Hunan a'r Hunan Arall'*, p. 43.
[31] Ibid., p. 43.
[32] Ibid., pp. 48-49.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., p. 50.
[36] Edited by J. E. Meredith (Gee Press, 1943). For J. R. Jones's 'confession of faith', see pp. 101-116.
[37] Dryw Press, 1970. The title of the book is taken from the Old Testament book of Daniel, ch. 3, v. 18.
[38] J. R. Jones, 'Love as Perception of Meaning', in *Religion and Understanding,* ed. D. Z. Phillips (Oxford, 1967) and 'Belief and Loss of Belief' (with D. Z. Phillips), *Sophia* (April 1970), reprinted in D. Z. Phillips's *Wittgenstein and Religion* (London, 1993).
[39] *Tractatus*, 6.44.

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Chapter 5

Howard Mounce: Wittgensteinian Transcendent Realism?

MICHAEL WESTON

Howard Mounce has published books on moral philosophy (co-authored with D.Z. Phillips), Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, American Pragmatism and David Hume, and articles on a wide range of topics from Zande witchcraft to the smell of coffee, many of which express a debt to the philosophy of Wittgenstein.[1] Such a bare summary, while suggesting what is true, that Mounce is a thinker who has contributed to a variety of philosophical areas – ethics, metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of religion, and so forth – would fail to indicate a surprising unifying project which becomes increasingly apparent in his writings after the book on the *Tractatus*: the attempt to show that something like the classical or transcendent realism characteristic of Western philosophy from Plato to the end of the Middle Ages is justified and is in fact the message of Wittgenstein's later writings.

The central ideas of this realism Mounce sets out in a chapter he contributed to an introduction to the philosophy of religion[2] in 1998. We can understand the world to the extent we do only because it has an intelligible order in which the mind shares. This order is manifest in the world but at the same time transcends it. The concepts through which the world is intelligible are manifested in the world but go beyond any particular range of instances: they are normative, determining what it is reasonable or unreasonable to think, what has sense and what doesn't. This order is already implicit in the world, it is not of our making. The intelligibility of the world, and so the possibility of truth about it, presupposes the objectivity of value. We, too, participate in this order, the nature of the human being determining the standard for human life, what we are meant to be. The intelligible order of the world is not self-explanatory but points to its source in Mind (but not, of course, ours): it is figurative but not wrong to attribute it to the Divine Mind or God. Since we are merely part of the world, there is more to the world than we can know or understand. We have reason and because of the harmony between our nature and the intelligible order of the world we can understand it within the limits of our finite nature. Truth about the world, both the intelligible order and its manifestation in the world, is something we are subordinate to: we uncover it in various ways, but it is not accountable in terms of human capacities and attributes alone. Part of the truth is moral and religious: so moral and religious values are objective.

This was, according to Mounce, the dominant world view from Plato to the end of the Middle Ages. What characterizes the modern period from Descartes on, in an increasingly explicit way, is the attempt to account for the intelligibility of the world without recourse to transcendence, in terms of the capacities of the human being itself. Since this project is incoherent, it has had its explicit opponents and has resulted in internal tensions and contradictions in the thought of those who have tried to carry it out. This is Mounce's interest in Hume and the American Pragmatists. The theme of Mounce's Hume book[3] is the tension between his empiricist inheritance, part of the modern project, and a naturalism he shares with the so-called Scottish common sense philosophers like Reid. Empiricism claims the source of our knowledge lies within us, in sense experience. Hume showed, and is sometimes taken to be sceptical about human knowledge because of this, that we cannot explain our fundamental beliefs about the world, for example in causation, in terms of sense experience alone. We never observe a causal connection, only the temporal and spatial contiguity of events. Hume is rather to be read as proposing that our sense experience is only intelligible in terms of certain fundamental beliefs which cannot be justified in terms of that experience. Natural beliefs in causation and an independent world are implanted in us and only on their basis can we reason and find our experience intelligible. The source of these beliefs lies not in our experience and activity, but rather in the world of which we are a part. The world thus transcends us and through reflecting on the givenness of the harmony between our natural beliefs and our capacities, on the one hand, and the world we come to understand, on the other, we are drawn towards a belief in the Divine intelligence which is the ultimate source of the world's and our own intelligibility. Hume is not, then, to be read as either a sceptic about human knowledge or in relation to religious belief at least in its Deist form.

Similarly, Mounce's engagement with American Pragmatism[4] reads Peirce as opposing the modern project while later pragmatists like Dewey and Rorty try to further it by neglecting fundamental aspects of Peirce's work. Peirce's 'Pragmatic Maxim'[5], to the effect that meaning is determined by human practice so that if two formulations have the same application in practice they have the same meaning, might seem to make meaning and so intelligibility a product of human activity and so be part of the modern project. But such a view for Mounce would neglect the basis for Peirce's maxim. To grasp meaning is indeed to acquire a capacity which we exercize in our understanding of the world. But this is possible because objects in the world have themselves real dispositions which constitute their nature. We understand them through grasping their dispositions in dispositions of our own. Peirce here shares what Mounce calls, following Leibniz, the 'Perennial Philosophy'. The intelligibility of the world lies in law which cannot itself be explained by phenomena in the world themselves. Law shows itself in the ways objects behave: it is what can be understood as governing their movement and change. The world, in its intelligibility, is revealed as the word of the Divine Mind, the source of all intelligibility, God.[6]

For Rorty, however, the 'Pragmatic Maxim' becomes an expression of the unintelligibility of a reference beyond human practice to account for intelligibility. Descartes had bequeathed to philosophy an insoluble problem. Starting from our thoughts, how are we to secure knowledge of a world independent of them? If knowledge is to be the mirror of nature, the mind reflecting the world, we cannot, as mind, ever know that our thought reflects something independent of it. We can check one thought or representation only by referring it to another: we can never have access to a world independent of our representations. Descartes' problem is insoluble. The resolution rather is to get rid of the image of knowledge which produced it. Knowledge is to be understood not as a relation between representations and an independent world, but rather as a relation between judgements. All descriptions are produced in terms of human linguistic practices which contain norms of justification for assertions. 'Knowledge' as 'congruence of mind and reality' is to be replaced by knowledge as the right, by current standards, to believe. But current standards may be opposed by others. There can be no appeal beyond these conflicting norms to an independent world to determine which are better. Where such incommensurability occurs, the resolution is simply a matter of which standards prevail and thereby become the current ones in terms of which knowledge claims are justified. But new standards, forms of linguistic practice, are always possible, and historical experience suggests that whatever we claim as 'knowledge' now will be replaced. We must, therefore, always hold any current knowledge claim, and the practices within which it is justified, as revisable, and so we should actively promote institutions for seeking new viewpoints.[7]

Mounce argues that Rorty's view entails a vicious regress. For Rorty, the justification of a belief involves a potentially infinite process of reinterpretation: the process can never be halted since what is justified in terms of current standards may become unjustified in relation to standards which replace them. For Mounce, this is vicious because there is no justification if the process is endless. Justification never in fact gets underway: we should be involved in a conversation whose only point is to keep itself going.[8] Against this infinite process, Mounce suggests that my entitlement to a belief rests not in referring it to another belief but to the way I acquired it. I am entitled to the belief 'It is raining' by having been outside to look. Of course, this appeal is to the norms of a practice, but these are consistent with my finding either it is or it is not raining. The norms and their associated background beliefs about the normality of conditions are not sufficient to determine truth: for that I have to actually look. Without an intelligible doubt about the normality of the situation, questions about the satisfactory nature of the justification become unintelligible.[9] This would, however, leave it open for Rorty to suggest that such a question would arise if an alternative practice with different norms were proposed, and that we do not know now that this will not occur. Mounce probably needs here some claim that the procedures he refers to embody something like Hume's 'natural belief' to which we cannot envisage alternatives.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* embodies for Mounce a species of the realism that characterized pre-modern philosophy. When the text announces that 'The world is all that is the case', 'the world' is construed as what can be stated in propositions. Reality is thinkable: what must be the nature of reality for this to be possible? There must be an isomorphism between thought, the proposition, and reality. The general form of the proposition, that it is a truth-function of elementary propositions which are logically simple, consisting only of names, corresponds to the structure of reality, that it consists of situations constructed in a logically combinatory form from elementary states of affairs consisting solely of 'objects'. Here, the 'harmony' between thought and reality is a matter of their sharing logical form. Since what can be said is propositional, what makes it possible for there to be propositions (the logical form of the proposition and of reality) is not something which can be said. It 'shows' itself in the truth-functional analysis of propositions in a perspicuous symbolism. In so far as the *Tractatus* appears to articulate this logical form in propositions, it must produce a species of nonsense. Nevertheless, such nonsense has a point. 'Logic can be stated' and 'Logic cannot be stated' equally lack sense (are not propositions having truth-falsity polarity), but the latter has a point in attempting to put a stop to utterances of the former kind (the generation of metaphysical theories).[10] When that function is served, the denial, since it says nothing, becomes useless and can be discarded. Nevertheless, there *is* something shown which the propositions of the *Tractatus* illicitly try to say. What is shown is the transcendence of logical form to the world, what is the case, as its possibility, and the independence of the world in the truth-falsity polarity of any proposition. Thus, in his discussion of the *Tractatus* on solipsism, Mounce remarks that there is 'a truth behind solipsism, but it cannot be stated'. The apparent problem with his position immediately becomes clear when he then tells us what that truth is: 'The truth is not that I alone am real but that I have a point of view on the world which is without neighbours.'[11]

Perhaps Mounce would say that his own formulations, like the Tractarian ones, aim to prevent confusion, not to convey a statable truth. Nevertheless, when the confusions are removed, for Mounce there is communication, something is shown which we find ourselves expressing in a misleading way. It can only be *shown* in analysis of our propositions. Recently, in discussing James Conant's and Cora Diamond's rejection of such a reading of the *Tractatus* on the grounds that the idea of, as it were, sensible nonsense, is itself nonsense, Mounce objects that the existence of what transcends experience may manifest itself in experience. The propositions of the *Tractatus* are intended not to indicate what eludes language, which would be nonsense, but rather what shows itself in language. There is something shown, but its nature means that any attempted expression of it must fail. Nevertheless, the failure is revelatory.[12]

This is, in fact, what Mounce takes as the essential nature of Wittgenstein's later work too. Against the emphasis on the 'therapeutic' interpretation of the later Wittgenstein (and the earlier, too, if one follows Conant and Diamond), Mounce maintains that the distinction between saying and showing remains central there, and indeed gives point to the activity of dispelling conceptual confusion. Logic (in the sense of grammar) cannot be stated, since any such statement is senseless except to those capable of applying the grammar. Application of signs is prior to any rule of grammar, so that in 'stating rules for language, we soon fall into silence, and then we are left with what shows itself in the use of language itself.'[13] And what 'shows itself' in the application of language itself is (something akin to) the 'classical or transcendental realism' which finds (a misleading expression in) philosophy in its pre-modern manifestations. For example, Mounce cites the discussion in *On Certainty* of Moore's attempted proof of external objects. Moore's attempt at a *proof* was misguided, Mounce claims, because perspicuous analysis of sense-experience will show it already presupposes a world which transcends it. It is this, Mounce believes, that Wittgenstein is claiming in saying against Moore that 'My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on – I tell a friend, e.g., “Take that chair over there”, “Shut the door”, etc.’ What philosophers have tried to prove (the externality of the world, the reality of the past, the existence of other selves, and so on) cannot indeed be proved, but rather shows itself in the perspicuous analysis of language in its application. Mounce says, for example:

> [O]n the positivist view, the truth of a statement about the past is constituted by its cohering with the available evidence. Perspicuous analysis will reveal that this is false not simply to metaphysical realism but to ordinary speech. Nor is that a coincidence, for ordinary speech is implicitly realist. The metaphysical realist therefore strives to prove what he might easily have shown in a perspicuous analysis. Wittgenstein retained this view to the end of his life.[14]

The propositions of the *Tractatus* attempt to articulate the realism of ordinary language: they fail in the sense that what they attempt to say is shown in the application of language. For the *Tractatus*, this application lay in stating facts. The possibility of propositional statements rests on the isomorphism of reality and thought in its symbolic form (whether linguistic or other ‘picturing’ forms). Reality (as what is the case) transcends the proposition since the proposition is necessarily either true or false and reality determines which it is. And reality as the totality of facts is already logically structured and so able to be expressed propositionally. Both the transcendence of reality to our thought (its independence) and the transcendence of logical form to reality (as the condition of its possibility) show themselves in the perspicuous analysis of propositions in their application of stating. The later Wittgenstein, for Mounce, recognizes that the notion of a connection between language and the world does not explain the possibility of thought but rather itself needs explaining. Hence the importance of the notion of concept formation in his later work: forms of language arise as extensions and developments of ways human beings are already active in the world. The language of time can only be learnt by the child who already looks for the lost ball, expects her tea and plays attentively now with her toys; the language of physical objects can only be learnt by one who already avoids the chair leg as she crawls across the room, sits on her chair and reaches for her spoon, and so on. As Mounce says, ‘it is not through language that the child is related to the world; one might say that language is related to the world through the child.'[15] The philosopher who tries to prove the reality of the past or of the external world is responding to sceptical doubt. But if we are willing to put these matters in question, then, as the sceptic insists, anything we offer in the way of proof becomes equally questionable. The error is to allow the reality of the past or the external world to be presented as a claim upon which our practices rest which would require proof. Rather, the development of our concepts of time or of the external world already presupposes forms of activity in the world which are instinctual and are therefore prior to the possibility of any claim in language. These instinctual relations for Mounce are already implicitly realist: they are responses to the world, the past, and so on, in its transcendence, independence of, the human being. What the philosopher tries to prove (the reality of the past or the external world) is shown in the perspicuous analysis of our language in its application. What gets shown there is that our linguistic practices are extensions and developments of our instinctual relations to independent reality which cannot therefore be put into question.

Our understanding of the world is, then, itself a result of the world: it is a naturally shared extension of primitive reactions to the world. It is this, I think, which underlies Mounce's thought that our understanding of the world relates to only part of reality since we ourselves constitute only such a part. Reality transcends our understanding and we are (perhaps) sometimes brought into contact with events which are beyond our understanding. I say 'perhaps' because it is always possible for such events to be dismissed as misdescribed or as the subject for later, presently unavailable, explanation. Such an attitude, if generally adopted, however, Mounce takes to be dangerously closed to the possibility of encountering what is beyond our understanding. A character's remark (Zalman's) in a story by I. Singer, 'People do vanish', is aimed, according to Mounce, to startle us, 'to raise possibilities hitherto excluded. He wishes his fellows to admit that there are more things in heaven and earth than they are prepared to contemplate in their normal practices.'[16] Again, in *The Two Pragmatisms* he refers to a case of faith healing in which a minister in Glasgow acquired a capacity to relieve suffering and sometimes effect cures in the sick. The gift

> appeared as a result of sustained prayer in which Peddie [the minister] showed his faith in God and his desire to serve him. If God is non-existent, faith vain, and prayer a delusion, it becomes not easier but altogether harder to explain why Peddie's gift appeared.[17]

Of course, granted the phenomenon, it is always possible to claim that some natural understanding may be found for it, but Mounce thinks that the refusal to countenance the possibility of encountering what passes our understanding is evidence of a failure to accept that, as merely a part of reality, our understanding is necessarily limited.[18] As D. Z. Phillips remarks about Mounce's discussion of the Singer story, this makes it sound as if these events can be explained, but not by us. We encounter extraordinary events which would require an explanation beyond our capacities, and such explanation requires reference to a supernatural source, God.[19] This is indeed, I think, Mounce's claim.

This tendency in Mounce's thought may cause us to return to his claim that Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing is central to his later thought and that what is shown in the application of language is what philosophers have tried to prove, the reality of the external world, the past, and so on. When Wittgenstein says in *On Certainty* (section 25) that one can be wrong even about 'there being a hand here. Only in certain cases is it impossible', are we to conclude that such an example shows we believe in an unquestionable manner in the reality of hands? I think we should decline to follow this suggestion on at least two grounds. Firstly, it remains complicit with sceptical questioning to which philosophical realism is a response while Wittgenstein's examples intend to undermine the appearance of intelligibility which such questions have. Wittgenstein is certainly indicating that in such a case the conditions for raising a question, for doubt, are absent, but equally the conditions for assertion are absent too. If the intelligibility of the sceptic's question is challenged in the example, so too is that of the realist's response. The game here of doubt and assertion indeed involves a non-propositional certainty, but as such this is not a matter of, nor presupposes, knowledge or belief. Secondly, Wittgenstein's examples, in showing the unintelligibility of the sceptical question and the realist response, serve to show something further which is obscured by Mounce's formulation, namely, the sense of 'reality' in this context. The possibility of assertions is provided by the conditions under which doubt can be raised and removed, claims to truth justified, within a linguistic practice, and these show us what it is to speak of the 'independently real' here. The ways in which questions of 'truth' can be raised and answered is different in different forms of language (compare talk of hands with that of sensations or character dispositions, say) as is, therefore, the notion of the 'independently real' internal to these forms. To speak, as Mounce does, of Wittgenstein's examples as showing belief in or knowledge of 'reality' is to leave unarticulated the sense of reality at issue, and thereby to give the impression that a single sense of 'reality' runs through the variety of forms of language since they all involve, in the conditions for doubt and assertion, reference to such 'knowledge or belief'. But such a sense of 'reality' would be abstracted from, rather than showing itself in, the application of language. The *Tractatus* speaks of the general form of the proposition and so correspondingly of the general form of reality. But once, with the later Wittgenstein, we recognize that language does not have this kind of unity, we recognize that 'the real' lacks it too. There is no philosophically useful notion of 'reality as such'[20]; rather the sense which 'reality' has is given in the very various ways in which questions of 'truth' arise and conditions of doubt are intelligible in different forms of language. It makes no sense, therefore, to see these as merely parts of a 'reality' which transcends them.

This is not to deny, as Mounce claims in relation to Winch,[21] that no criticism of forms of language is then possible. Mounce says that, in Winch's discussion of Zande witchcraft, Winch makes 'There are witches' a conceptual truth rather than a theoretical or empirical one, thereby exempting it from the possibility of criticism. He objects that, although it is indeed not an issue for the Azande, others outside Zande life may think it ought to be. But the question is what the 'ought' means here. There are varied possibilities of criticism. It may, of course, be that we can make no sense of the talk of the reality of witches at all. Winch tries to show this sense by analogy with our own understandings of religious forms of life, which are not concerned with providing a further explanation of the world but which come into play where all forms of explanation have done their work. Whether Winch is successful in this is not here an issue. Or it may be that their talk of ‘witches’ is part of a practice of causal explanation which we can then criticize in terms of our own more developed scientific practice. But unless we first try to understand the nature of the notion of the ‘independently real’ here, we shall not be able to consider what forms of criticism are possible. Mounce’s talk of a ‘conceptual truth’ rather than an ‘empirical’ or ‘theoretical’ one gestures towards a common conception of ‘reality’ in terms of which the Zande conception can be criticized, as if ‘there are witches’ were a claim about reality underlying Zande practice. It is as if Mounce were understanding practices containing a conception of the ‘independently real’ as interpretations of an underlying reality which is ultimately beyond our finite comprehension but towards which we are oriented, in the manner of a Kantian Idea of Reason. I have suggested that this picture lies behind Mounce’s claim that what philosophers have tried to prove shows itself in the application of language; we will find it, too, in his conception of moral practices as approximations to a final truth about the Good. Of course, Mounce thinks this is shown in the application of language (something which Kant could equally have claimed). It seems to me, however, that Wittgenstein’s later work proposes that such a conception of ‘reality’ abstracts us from the varied (and undelimitable) ways in which a notion of the ‘independently real’ manifests itself in different forms of language. Winch in his discussion furthers this enterprise in trying to show us what talk of the reality of witches in Zande life amounts to, what the sense of the ‘independently real’ is in this context. And we should have to do the same in connection with talk of ‘empirical’ or ‘theoretical’ reality too. They do not point towards some overarching conception of reality which can form the standard for criticism in general, even as an unattainable ideal, of forms of language. What the possibilities of criticism are has to be taken case by case, and even if we agree with Winch that the Zande talk does embody a conception of the ‘independently real’ this does not preclude criticism from the point of view of related ethical and religious conceptions.

Mounce, I suspect, like the sceptic, and the philosophical realists who try to answer the sceptic's questions, feels there must be a further issue, over and beyond the ways we do remove doubt and make assertions, as to whether these ways really put us into contact with reality. The resolution to this question for him, of course, is not to be found in a theory, which could be argued about, but in what shows itself in the perspicuous analysis of the application of language. That our practices make contact with reality is shown in their formation on the basis of instinctive relations to it, so that they are themselves products of reality, and in the continuing possibility of criticism of their conception of reality so that they are answerable to something over and beyond themselves. We are then seen, as Aristotle thought, as the part of the universe which understands the world. It is this which then enables Mounce to see the 'reality' we understand as simply a part of a reality beyond our comprehension, a notion of 'reality' abstracted from the conditions under which we can or cannot assert that something is so. Wittgenstein's later work seems to me, however, directed against the philosophical motivations which prompt the development of such a notion. What shows itself to us in forms of language, and can be articulated, is rather the varied senses which the notion of the 'independently real' can take. These do not compose parts of a general notion of 'reality', nor does what is the case in terms of this variety constitute aspects of an all-encompassing reality we know only in part.

It is illuminating in this respect to compare Mounce's treatment of morality in his first book, *Moral Practices,*[22] co-authored with D. Z. Phillips, with that found in his recent work. *Moral Practices* was an attempt to draw out some of the consequences for moral philosophy of the later work of Wittgenstein. Moral judgement and decision, the book tells us, are intelligible only where certain matters are not open to judgement or decision. A particular falsehood may be condemned as wrong because it is a lie, but this is not because lying itself is judged as wrong. Rather, lying is one of the criteria in terms of which (for us, say) judgement of wrongness takes place. However, although for any moral agent some facts ('It is a lie') will entail some things are right or wrong, it is not the case that the same things fulfil this function for every moral agent. Rather, there are different moral practices in terms of which the same facts will entail different conclusions: in Sparta, private property was considered of little significance and a man was admired if he succeeded in tricking another.[23] There is an irreducible variety in moral practices[24] and so in the possibility of permanent radical moral disagreement.[25] It is not possible to resolve such disagreements by referring to the 'human good' since what is deemed humanly good is itself determined by moral beliefs. So with the variety of moral practices goes a variety of conceptions of what constitutes human good and harm, and there is no *a priori* limit to the forms this can take. We cannot deny the multiplicity of moral practices both within and between societies without falsification.[26] The philosopher, however, may say that if we have such opposing conceptions of human good and harm, we must determine which, if any, is the correct one, otherwise we cannot know what is really right or wrong. *Moral Practices* raises two kinds of consideration in response to this demand. The objection, firstly, treats the opposing moral perspectives as if they were hypotheses about some state of affairs (the human good) in the way there may be conflicting astronomical theories about a star. But in the latter case we can imagine what sort of evidence might settle the matter for there is something independent of the theories against which they can be checked. But moral perspectives are not theories, they are not interpretations of something more ultimate than themselves. Nevertheless, this does not mean that anything whatever can be said here. The notion of the independently real has its place, although in a different form from that found in the case of scientific theorizing: the moral status of participants in a practice is determined by their relation to the conception of human good contained within it. The second kind of consideration raised against the philosophical question of which, if any, of two conflicting moral perspectives is correct, is what we might call the issue of the existential status of the question. We have to ask what the nature of the question 'Which conception of human good is right?' is. As Kierkegaard might have said, the philosopher is a human being like any other, so if he or she is asking this question seriously, it can only be heard as an expression of existential doubt, of someone genuinely at sea in relation to what they value, an expression of despair. But if we are not in despair, if we are sure of our moral convictions, what could the question of rightness amount to? If we are asked why we are right in our moral position, our answer would be in terms of the content of the values concerned, since it is by reference to them that judgements of right and wrong can be made. We would not say that our rightness consisted in our saying we were right, in our willing this, since this would not be to relate to the values as determining our moral worth but as determining their worth in terms of ourselves. But does this rejection of the philosophical question commit us to saying that we and our opponents are right from our different moral perspectives? But again, we have to ask who is saying this[27]since neither we nor our opponents could say it, as for both of us questions of right and wrong are determined by the values concerned, not the rightness of the values by something else. This is not, then, relativism, if relativism is the view that what is right or wrong is to be determined relative to the perspectives of individuals, groups, societies and so forth. In suggesting this, the relativist, just as much as the absolutist who believes there must be a single standard to judge any moral perspective, removes herself from the judgement of rightness as if she is not necessarily, as a human being, implicated in a conception of the human good. Rather the conclusion to be drawn is that we should not try, philosophically, to reduce moral practices to a single form nor forget that questioning of a moral practice always proceeds in terms of another practice to which the questioner is related in a comparable way to those involved in the questioned practice.

Now compare this with some remarks Mounce makes in a recent review.[28] Plato, Mounce there tells us, argued that the various moral codes are all imperfect reflections of an absolute good which we, as finite beings, can only know imperfectly. Intractable moral disagreement supports Plato’s view, since it shows that each contestant holds their view as absolute and so expects others to agree. Where we do not expect such agreement, there we make our judgement relative to our own position: you have your tastes, I have mine. We would not say we are entitled to condemn an opponent only if he is prepared to agree with us, but rather that his not doing so exacerbates the condemnation. Mounce concludes by saying:

> I suspect that Plato's view can be avoided only by resorting to outright scepticism. One has to suppose that in their moral judgements people are systematically mistaken or confused.[29]

The contrast with the position of *Moral Practices* could not be more marked. Different moral practices are subject to a common standard, although one we can only know in part. Moral disagreement shows an implicit recognition of this: we show that we believe there is a standard valid for all in our condemnation of our opponents. Hence, we are bound to regard the other as 'systematically mistaken or confused'. If we then claim to be in possession of the truth about morality, we should have to justify this since it is something equally claimed by our opponents. Such a process of justification, appealing to the existence of a standard valid for all moral agents, leads, Mounce believes, to a recognition of that standard as lying in something like Plato's absolute good.

This position is expounded at greater length in 'Morality and Religion'. There he emphasizes again that moral value is regarded as 'absolute' and not 'relative'. That is, moral value is independent, and the judge, of whatever we may happen to desire or need.[30] Not being relative to the latter, we do not in moral matters agree to differ, as when having different tastes. Rather, 'when it comes to what is fundamental in his morality, every person speaks in absolute terms. He expresses himself as though he were speaking not simply for his fellows but for the whole of humanity.'[31] This means that every moral perspective claims for itself universal validity, a claim which requires justification. Now, following Hume, Mounce claims we do not value something because it is good but rather call it good because we value it. As in *Moral Practices*, we judge things as good in terms of their relation to what is centrally valued in one's moral practice which is not then valued because it is good. Every morality (conception of duty and goodness) values something other than morality. It is because we value family, class, nation, humanity, and so on (Mounce's examples), that we then have the differing conceptions of duty and goodness characteristic of differing moral practices. But each moral perspective claims its central values as absolute and thus having universal validity. One claims a particular duty has absolute value (overrides whatever one may happen to want or need) by reference to something else (family, nation, and so on) which is claimed to have absolute value. But, Mounce now argues, such a claim can only be justified if that something else is in its nature absolute. Only God is such an object since only God is the standard for any human relation whatever (and therefore the standard in terms of which family, class, nation and humanity are themselves to be judged). All other valued objects are, as it were, intra-worldly, whereas God is the standard for the world itself. It is because the object of a religious morality is absolute that its duties are themselves absolute, determined as they are by God. Without the conception of God, therefore, the claim of absolute value which characterizes any moral perspective cannot be justified: all secular moralities suffer from confusion.

This is, Mounce claims, characteristic of the contemporary condition. In secular moralities, morality is still felt as absolute but they have no object which could explain that feeling. Philosophical attempts to resolve this problem without recourse to God necessarily fail. Utilitarianism proposes a common end of human actions, pleasure or happiness, as the absolute standard, but pleasure or happiness can be an end only for someone who already values other things. We can seek the pleasure of music only if we value music, so pleasure cannot explain that value. Pleasure and happiness are secondary ends. Deontologists propose the autonomy of morality so that duty is valued in itself, overriding all other values. But, as we have seen, morality, a conception of duties, is secondary to the valuing of something else. Relativism proposes that the individual can be judged right or wrong only in relation to the social practices in which he or she is a participant, while those practices cannot themselves be judged. They are neither right nor wrong. But, then, in conflict between societies or groups, no question can arise as to who is right, a view which, in the light of the absolute claims made by each of the opposing parties, is untenable. Social relativism collapses into its individual form. If there is a conflict between society and my individual will, why should I follow society's standards? We cannot settle this by referring to the authority of those standards, since this is precisely what is at issue. Whichever way I decide, whether for or against society's standards, will simply be a matter of my will. My will becomes the source of all my values, and so moral value, as absolute and not relative to my will, disappears.[32]

Secular moralities are, therefore, always involved in an intellectual confusion. Their absolute duties are derived from something else which is absolutely valued, but they have no means of justifying this evaluation. A reflective individual will feel 'that he cannot fully account for the point or meaning of what he feels'[33] unless he has a religious view of existence. What would *Moral Practices* have made of this train of thought? The argument is this. We value morality (duties, conceptions of human good and harm) absolutely only by referring them to something else (family, nation, and so forth) we value absolutely. But only God can be justifiably absolutely valued because only God is the absolute object: all other objects are intra-wordly whereas God is transcendent to the world and therefore its standard. Secular moralities are involved in the possibility of radical disagreement precisely because they value absolutely what is not by its nature absolute. For *Moral Practices*, we value morality (duties and a conception of human good and harm) in terms of valuing something else, a form of human life characteristic of a moral practice. In so far as it is in terms of that form of human life that we judge all else, it is the standard of our valuing and not the subject of valuation. In that sense, we value it absolutely. But to say this is, of course, to deny that, for someone within such a moral practice, the question of the value of the overriding conception can arise at all. If it does, this marks an existential slackening of the hold of that conception on the individual. For them, the suggestion that their conception of life is not absolute because it is subject to a further valuation in terms of a religious conception of life can have no significance other than the proposal by the other of their competing conception. For the religious view is equally subject to evaluation in terms of the individual's own conception. The suggestion that this question (What is the appropiate object for absolute valuing?) arises for the 'reflective individual' who can then see, intellectually, the right answer, is to present that individual as if, in their reflection, they were divorced from themselves as an existing individual, one living in terms of some conception of the value of their life which determines the significance of anything within that life. For someone whose judgements are made in terms of some overriding conception of human life, the question what is the appropriate object of absolute valuing is equivalent to asking what determines the value of her life, and that is clear. The question could only be asked existentially as an expression of despair or existential doubt, and its resolution could only be sought in what could remove such despair. But that is not supposed to be what the 'reflective individual' is suffering. The question, in other words, is at one and the same time meant to be existential (to show an individual what the right way of life is) and yet not to have the character of a real existential problem. Religion is 'the standard of any human relation', the absolute, only in the sense that the absolute relation to God requires giving up all absolute relation to anything else (which is why Kierkegaard said that one can make a bid for Christianity only out of absolute despair). But this does not show that an absolute relation to other conceptions is an illusion: *that* is a judgement from within the religious perspective itself and entry to that is only via the rejection of worldly conceptions. As *Moral Practices* insisted, there is no existentially neutral point (occupied by a 'reflective individual') from which life-conceptions can be evaluated, and therefore no neutral standard in terms of which such evaluation can be carried out. To insist otherwise is to pretend that one is (as a philosopher) something different from what one is as an existing individual. The philosopher cannot raise the question of the significance of life, since this is necessarily something raised by an individual about their own. The philosopher must be content to recognize, as *Moral Practices* does, what follows from the existential character of the plurality of conceptions of human good contained within the variety of moral practices. Mounce's formulations distort this character. For example, to say each perspective 'claims to speak for all humanity' is no more than to say that its adherents value it absolutely. They present it as unconditionally valuable and so not as valuable because of their particular characteristics. As *Moral Practices* insists, its value is not a matter of its appealing to us. Rather, it gives value to our lives, not our lives to it. If it is said that in valuing it absolutely we require the agreement of others, then, again, this is transposing to this case a grammar which has its home elsewhere. I can 'require' your agreement where I can point to something over and beyond our positions which could settle the dispute. But, as *Moral Practices* says, existential perspectives are not interpretations of something more ultimate than themselves. Mounce's later argument is a result of failing to stay true to the existential character of the language of existence conceptions, whether religious or otherwise, and to what this means for the attendant concepts of 'problem', 'argument', 'resolution', 'reflection' and 'truth'. They must be understood in terms of an individual's relation to their own life, where one does not see 'the truth' of life and adopt it, but where one only sees 'truth' in adoption, where the truth is, as Kierkegaard says, the truth of appropriation. Mounce's argument depends on taking moral and religious concepts out of their existential context where they have their sense. It then appears possible to ask about 'the truth' of human life in a way separated from one's own existential position. *Moral Practices*, however, restricts itself to asking what it means for an individual to raise the question of the truth of their life, which is not itself a question about the truth of life.

Mounce wants to claim that one can only (really) value unconditionally the unconditioned. But this invites the question who is to say this. The claim runs together valuing something absolutely, that is, unconditionally, so that it gives value to one's life and not one's life to it, with valuing the unconditioned, that which is transcendent to the world, devotion to which requires dying to the world.[34] One can value the unconditioned unconditionally (follow the path of dying to the world) or conditionally (because to do so pays in terms of some other value, in which case one certainly will not follow that path). But one can equally value the conditioned (that of the world) unconditionally, so that it gives meaning to one's life and not one's life to it, or conditionally (because it pays in terms of something else valued). If the conditioned is valued unconditionally, then if it is taken away, one's life will lack meaning or have meaning to a marked lesser degree (one is simply existing, not living). If the unconditioned is unconditionally valued then nothing that happens can affect the meaningfulness of one's existence. Both are existential possibilities and each will see the other as deficient. To those whose lives are given meaning by concrete forms of life, the religious way of life may seem inhuman (severing properly human forms of attachment), to be using human relationships for a further purpose (as one puts one's relationship to God above all other relations in one's life), or, as Nietzsche thought, to be the product of a desire to make oneself safe no matter what may occur, a cowardice in the face of reality. To those who practice dying to the world, secular existences may seem lives of hidden despair (for what gives meaning to their lives may be taken away), or to practice discrimination in valuing certain parts of existence over others. But to say, as Mounce does, that the former are unable to account for the appropriateness of their unconditional valuing is to say that this is something they *could* recognize from within their present existential position. That would be for them to recognize that what gives meaning to their lives is subject to a higher standard. But that is precisely what is denied in saying that they unconditionally value it: that it gives meaning to their lives not their lives to it. Mounce can only say this if he thinks that they are really but unconsciously oriented towards the unconditioned. The model here would be the ascent of the soul in the *Symposium*, where the protagonist must discover that he is a 'lover of the form of beauty' through passing through a series of forms of life, the felt inadequacy of each driving him on to the next. Socrates' autobiography in the *Phaedo* follows a similar trajectory. Although this is a possible form of life history, it depends for its cogency on the presence of dissatisfaction to justify the claim that the individual is really looking for some form of life other than the one he lives. But in the absence of this, the claim that anyone who says they unconditionally value something other than the object of religious devotion is self-deceived, is merely an *a priori* stipulation, one that results from seeing all forms of life from the point of view of the religious. Mounce's claim is a result of, not an argument for, seeing existence from a religious point of view. It does not emerge from some general overriding viewpoint which both secularists and the religious can occupy. We see here the connection with Mounce's conception of 'reality': that too, I have suggested, is the result of removing the notion of the 'independently real' from the varied contexts within which it has differing senses.

NOTES

[1] Howard Mounce was born in 1939. He attended University College, Swansea. He taught at University College, Cardiff, from 1963 to 1969 and then at University College, Swansea, from 1969 to 1999. In 1999 he was elected an Honorary Fellow of what is now called Swansea University.

[2] 'Morality and Religion' in B. Davies (ed.) *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject*, London, 1998, pp. 253-286. (Hereafter MR.)

[3] H. O. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism*, London, 1999.

[4] H. O. Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms*, London, 1997. Hereafter, TP.

[5] TP p. 33.

[6] TP p. 54.

[7] See R. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 110, and TP p. 185.

[8] TP p. 189.

[9] TP p. 188.

[10] H. O. Mounce *Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus': An Introduction*, Oxford, 1981, p. 104.

[11] TP p. 91.

[12] Review of *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. A. Crary and R. Read, London and New York, 2000, in *Philosophical Investigations*, 2001, no. 2.

[13] Review p. 192.

[14] Review p. 189.

[15] TP p. 220.

[16] Review of P. Winch *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford, 1987, in *Philosophical Investigations*, 1988, 3, p. 239.

[17] TP p. 118.

[18] Even so, it is not clear why, once one has left behind anything our practices could countenance as an explanation, it is 'easier' to explain Peddies' case in terms of the truth of what he believes. One might suppose one just comes up against blank incomprehension. But Peddie is thinking in terms of one of our practices, and Mounce's other considerations about the role of God in relation to the intelligible structure of the world seem to be playing a role here. They raise the question, which would rebound on the Peddie case, of whether Christianity can be understood as providing 'explanations'.

[19] D. Z. Phillips 'From Coffee to Carmelites', in *Wittgenstein and Religion*, London, 1993, pp. 187-8.

[20] This does not mean that 'the nature of reality' no longer figures as a philosophical issue, but that it becomes a question about the way forms of language make up a common language. See D. Z. Phillips *Philosophy's Cool Place*, Cornell, 1999.

[21] Review of *Trying to Make Sense*.

[22] London, 1969. Hereafter MP.

[23] MP p. 15.

[24] MP p. 45.

[25] MP p. 51.

[26] MP p. 104.

[27] MP p. 102.

[28] Review of R. Macklin *Against Relativism,* Oxford, 1999, and J. W. Cook *Morality and Cultural Difference*, Oxford, 1999, in *Philosophical Quarterly*, 51, January 2001.
[29] Ibid., p. 124.
[30] MR p. 255.
[31] MR p. 280.
[32] MR p. 281.
[33] MR p. 283.
[34] This is the Christian demand. It is not, I think, part of Hinduism or Buddhism, for example. I am not sure what Mounce wants to say about the variety of what we call 'religious' understandings of life. Are forms of it outside the Western traditions he considers to be judged mistaken or confused? But if so, it can hardly be because they are secular in Mounce's terms.

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Chapter 6

D. Z. Phillips: Contemplation, Understanding, and the Particularity of Meaning

JOHN EDELMAN

I

In the last several years of his life,[1] first in *Philosophy's Cool Place*[2] and then in *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation,*[3] D. Z. Phillips presented what he called a 'contemplative' conception of philosophy. Themes familiar to readers of his earlier work – e.g., his distinction between a philosophical understanding of the 'grammar' of a concept and the 'personal appropriation' of a religious or moral belief or principle; his criticism of what might be called 'classical' natural theology coupled with his rejection of the label 'Wittgensteinian fideist'; his insistence upon the 'neutrality' of philosophy in opposition to the 'advocacy' of particular moral or religious viewpoints – all of these still appear in these late writings. But the talk of philosophy as 'contemplative' seems to amount to more than a re-packaging of earlier ideas. Stephen Mulhall, in a review of *Philosophy's Cool Place,*[4] speaks of a 'partial re-conceptualization' of Phillips's 'intellectual project' and identifies the impetus for it – surely rightly – in Phillips's editorial work on the papers of the late Rush Rhees.[5] But perhaps this re-conceptualization is better described not as 'partial' but as 'incomplete' or 'unfinished'. Just several months before his death in July of 2006, Phillips was still unsettled in his thinking about this 'contemplative' conception. Toward the end of 2005, in the course of a discussion that had been going on between us for a couple of years, he wrote:

> My question: If I want to say that Rhees's power as a philosopher comes from what he shows about [different religious and moral views] . . . and that he learns something AS A PERSON from all of this, how is this different from learning from one [of these views]? . . . Rhees would never say that what he had learned was a kind of synthesis of all the possibilities. . . . my main question is the kind of learning which comes through philosophical contemplation.

One might expect that Phillips had already settled on an answer to his ‘main question’ in *Philosophy’s Cool Place*. But even in the last chapter of *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* – published two years after *Philosophy’s Cool Place* – he wonders whether, in light of some of the arguments of his previous chapter, there is not good reason to question his ‘contemplative’ conception of philosophy. And the ‘good reason’ here is connected with the question he put to me about what is to be learned from philosophy so conceived: ‘Does [this conception] not conjure up a picture of the philosopher hovering over the limitations and indeterminacy of our comprehension, or lack of comprehension [of different cultures and of one another in a single culture], understanding all he surveys?’[6] He continues: ‘If our actual situation makes such transcendence impossible, why make it the aim of philosophy?’ I do not believe he ever envisioned such absolute transcendence or the philosopher’s consequent understanding ‘of all he surveys’ as the aim of philosophy. But he does seem to have thought that a philosopher could not carry out what he took to be ‘the philosophical task of doing justice to different points of view, some of which react with radical incomprehension to each other’[7] without attaining some measure, if not of transcendence, at least of disinterestedness regarding his or her own as well as others’ moral or religious beliefs:

> Philosophical contemplation, in trying to do justice to what it surveys, is not itself an attempt to arrive at a specific moral or religious viewpoint, but an effort to understand the kinds of phenomena we are confronted by in morality and religion. No doubt one’s own moral and religious views will affect this endeavor but, nevertheless, they are different from it.[8]

His insistence on this difference, however, raised for him the question of what sort of personal significance there could be in philosophical contemplation. If the understanding that comes from such contemplation is so distinct from any moral or religious understanding, then what bearing can it have on the actual life I live? Thus, again, what is it that anyone might learn ‘as a person’ from the ‘philosophical’ consideration of different moral and religious points of view, that is, from ‘philosophical contemplation’?

I do not think there is anything in the last chapter of *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* that settles any of this, and evidently Phillips did not think so either. So I have taken up here the question he put to me in his letter. At the time, I did not think that I had any substantial answer to offer him, and I am not confident now that I have anything to suggest that he had not already considered. But I do find myself increasingly persuaded that there is in Rhees's own writings more of an answer to Phillips's question than Phillips appears to have seen there. In one respect, the thought is not very promising, for Phillips certainly knew Rhees's writings better than I could hope to know them. Nonetheless, there seem to me to be real difficulties in any attempt to reconcile Phillips's description of 'philosophy's hermeneutic, contemplative task' of doing justice to different points of view[9] with a good deal of what Rhees does say about the understanding that can be found through philosophical contemplation. More precisely, it seems to me that Rhees's account of that understanding raises substantial questions about the talk of 'points of view', 'perspectives' and 'world-pictures' that is so much a part of Phillips's account of that contemplative task. Indeed, it appears to me that a growing awareness of these questions may be precisely what lay behind Phillips's question to me, and that that question reflects a movement toward a conception of philosophy's contemplative task rather different from the one he had so far articulated. My primary concern here, however, is not with biographical speculation but with the possibility of an answer to the question he put to me. Toward that end, I shall begin with some account of what Rhees and Phillips each means by 'contemplation' and of why each thinks it so important to philosophy, for even here, I think, significant contrasts quickly appear.

II

In the second volume of *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, Rhees writes:

> Contemplation involves thinking of other possibilities. Socrates wants to find what is common – be it the form of beauty, of equality, or of a triangle. Being able to recognise the same thing – you do not know what it is until you know what form it can take. Recognising this possibility 'of the same sort of thing' may put the original matter in a new light.[10]

Rhees contrasts such contemplation in philosophy with 'practicality, the view that study is only important if it tells you what to do, how to get on', saying that, for Socrates, 'that is ignorance'.[11] Phillips, too, talks of the contemplation of different 'possibilities' – different 'possibilities of sense'[12] or 'possibilities of moral sense'.[13] He also tells us that 'Rhees brings out how the philosophical concern with the possibility of sense is linked, in a contemplative conception of the subject, with wonder at the forms sense and saying something take for different people.'[14] He quotes Rhees at length from 'The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy':

> Perhaps it is that thinking about the notions of reality and of understanding leads one to the threshold of questioning the possibility of understanding at all, and to wonder at the possibility of understanding. Wonder is characteristic of philosophy anyway, as it is of the thinking of less corrupted peoples. Wonder at death – not trying to escape from death; wonder at (almost: reverence towards) madness; wonder that there should be the problems that there are, and that they should have the solutions that they do. (Pythagoras treating the 'discovery' that any triangle inscribed in a semi-circle is right-angled, as divine revelation, as a word to be reverenced.) Wonder at any natural scene that is beautiful. Wonder at the beauty of human actions and characters when it appears in them.[15]

Phillips insists that Rhees is not saying that the wonder is the same in all of these cases; nor that those who wonder in these ways are engaged in 'philosophical wonderment at the different ways in which people think'.[16] But he does take Rhees to be suggesting that these other examples of wonder may throw light on the presence of wonder in philosophy, and that 'a failure to see any point in these examples is likely to be linked, in some ways, with a failure to see any point in a contemplative conception of philosophy.'[17] And yet, while Rhees does speak of 'other possibilities' as the object of philosophical contemplation, neither 'the forms sense and saying something take for different people' nor 'the different ways in which people think' are among the objects of *wonder* mentioned by Rhees in the remarks that Phillips quotes here. Nor, I believe, are these mentioned as objects of wonder in any of Rhees's other published remarks. What Rhees does identify as an object of wonder in the remarks quoted is simply 'the possibility of understanding', and this difference seems to me more than a matter of emphasis.

The remarks quoted by Phillips belong to a discussion of the sense we may have that there is an 'internal connection between what you are engaged on in philosophy, and the sort of life you lead'.[18] Rhees notes how it might be suggested 'that we should be surprised to find anyone who was a serious philosopher and was at the same time a playboy or man about town'; and how we may feel 'that devotion to philosophy goes together with a certain asceticism in one's life, and a certain humility'.[19] So he asks what there is 'about the questions of philosophy that should affect one's outlook on other things in this way'.[20] The remarks about wonder belong to Rhees's answer to this question, and in them he seems to make two distinct points: first, that thinking about the notions of reality and of understanding may lead one constantly to the threshold of questioning the possibility of understanding at all; and, second, that it may lead one to wonder at the possibility of understanding. Unless I misunderstand him here, the wonder at the possibility of understanding is distinct from, though clearly related to, the questioning as to whether understanding is possible. It is wonder that understanding actually *is* possible, i.e., wonder that understanding is in fact attained by human beings. There is an obvious connection between such wonder and Rhees's evident preoccupation with problems of scepticism throughout many of his writings.[21] But, of course, Rhees is not suggesting that if you just get thinking about the problem of scepticism or about the relation between thought and reality or about what is meant by 'It is' – the questions he identifies as the 'central' questions of philosophy[22] – the result will be wonder and 'a certain humility'. In fact, quite to the contrary, he insists that to do philosophy one must be able 'not only to see questions where those not given to philosophy see none, but also to look on those questions in a particular way': 'Not wanting to dismiss the questions, nor "to get rid of them" through any sort of answer or to show that they are a sort of needless worry to be put out of mind.'[23] As he puts it in *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, the questions cannot be mere 'curiosities', nor can they be opportunities to test one's mettle or to 'meet the challenge', as though there were something here to master or to get the better of.[24] In fact, Rhees comes back again and again to the idea that philosophy is not a skill or an accomplishment.[25] To think it is and so to be caught up in any concern for recognition or for prestige or admiration[26] can only get in the way of our attending to the questions or problems themselves, our trying 'to understand the questions – and from this angle or in this sense to understand human thinking and human investigation and human life; to understand how [these questions] arise in, and in one sense belong to, our thinking about other questions that we ask and answer.'[27]

Part of what is to be emphasized here is that for Rhees it is not at all obvious what sort of questions the central questions of philosophy really are.[28] If I understand him, the difficulty in seeing what the questions do amount to is at least part of the reason why 'Philosophers have almost always found that their discussions were in large part about what philosophy is.'[29] But it is precisely the desire to understand these 'central' questions and the consequent demand that we actually 'attend' to them that lead Rhees to speak here of ‘contemplation of the ways in which people think and inquire – e.g., trying to solve problems in physics, or in connexion with moral problems’.[30] Rhees thinks that such contemplation is especially difficult in a culture such as ours, preoccupied as it is with ‘getting things done, with how to do things, with results’.[31] But the need for it goes with the contrast Socrates draws between the philosopher and the rhetorician who ‘is always in a hurry’.[32] The philosopher is not in a hurry because he is a ‘philosopher’, one caught up in the ‘love of wisdom’, or, as Plato presents it, the love of learning or of understanding (*philomatheia*).[33] All of which is to say that Rhees's talk of contemplation is rooted in his conception of the character of any genuine interest in the questions of philosophy – that any such interest is an interest in understanding.[34] But it should be added that for him that is also a very personal interest, if only because, as he sees it, a philosopher's interest in understanding is, largely at any rate, an interest in understanding how there can be understanding at all.

This is why it seems to me significant that while philosophical contemplation leads Rhees to wonder at the reality of understanding, it leads Phillips to wonder at ‘the forms that sense and saying something take for different people’ or at ‘the different ways in which people think’. Indeed, on two occasions when, in *Philosophy's Cool Place*,[35] Phillips quotes Rhees's remarks about ‘contemplation of the ways in which people think and inquire’, he does so in order to underscore the ‘neutrality’ of philosophy in opposition to the philosophical ‘advocacy’ of particular moral or religious views. I take the central point behind this talk of neutrality to be fairly straightforward, namely, that the notion that philosophy ‘underwrites’ any particular understanding of the moral life or any particular religious point of view – and so the notion of a ‘philosophical perspective’ from which to adjudicate between rival conceptions of the moral life or between different viewpoints on religious matters – is a fiction.[36] In Phillips's view, the failure to see this is a failure to appreciate the nature of some of those conflicts or differences and so a failure to do justice to those different ‘conceptions’ or ‘viewpoints’ or, as he sometimes calls them, ‘world-pictures’.[37] I am not suggesting any necessary incompatibility between Phillips's concern to do justice to the different forms that understanding can take for human beings and the concern behind Rhees's own talk of philosophy as ‘contemplative’. But, as I hinted above, I think there may well be an incompatibility between Phillips's description of ‘philosophy's hermeneutical, contemplative task’ in terms of ‘perspectives’ and ‘world-views’ and Rhees's account of the understanding that is, for him, an object of wonder. The very notion of such an incompatibility may seem suspect, given that Rhees himself, like Wittgenstein, often speaks of 'world-pictures'.[38] But it is not the expression itself that is the issue. The question I mean to raise is whether Rhees's criticisms of Wittgenstein's talk of 'rules of language' and of 'language-games' and especially the difficulties Rhees sees in Wittgenstein's use of the expression 'form of life' do not have an important bearing on what we are to make of Phillips's talk of 'perspectives', 'points of view' and 'world-pictures'. I shall argue that they do, and that they in fact suggest a sense in which one cannot do justice to the different understandings that human beings actually possess while retaining such talk. Indeed, to see this, I think, is to see how the use of those expressions can obscure the very personal significance that philosophical contemplation and the understanding that may come from it had for Rhees. No doubt, all of this will require a substantial account of Rhees's criticisms of Wittgenstein. But it may be best to begin with some account of how some of the difficulties that motivate those criticisms also appear in Phillips's talk of 'perspectives' and 'world-pictures'.

III

In the second volume of *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, Rhees writes:

> Plato holds that where language and life are concerned, one has sense only if the other does – and only then. Only where it is possible for literature to say anything is it possible for science to say anything. You do not need philosophy to distinguish between true and false statements in these contexts, but it is concerned with the possibility of doing so – a possibility denied in philistinism and sophistic arguments.[39]

Rhees might have added, 'and denied by scepticism', for the sophistic arguments he has in mind here are expressions of the scepticism that is, I should argue, his chief concern both in *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* and in the two volumes of *In Dialogue with the Greeks.*[40] Indeed, at the conclusion of the second volume of *In Dialogue with the Greeks* he characterizes philosophy as 'the enemy of philistinism and scepticism'.[41] When he says that you do not need philosophy to distinguish between true and false statements in literature or science but that the concern of philosophy is with the possibility of doing so, he is pointing to the sense in which philosophy's concern with scepticism is a concern with the possibility of 'saying something' at all. He takes this to have been a central concern through all of Wittgenstein's work, and it seems to me that much of his own criticism of particular aspects of that work turns on the question whether Wittgenstein provides us with an adequate response to scepticism, an 'adequate' response being one that shows clearly enough – or as clearly as one can – what Rhees might have called 'the reality of understanding'. In fact, the connections between the possibility of 'saying something' and the problem of scepticism, as well as the enduring place these held in Wittgenstein's thought, are brought out by Rhees in a passage often quoted or referred to by Phillips in connection with his own concern with the contemplation of 'possibilities of sense'. It will be helpful, I think, to give a very full version of the remarks to which Phillips frequently refers.[42] They are to be found in Rhees's 'Some Developments in Wittgenstein's View of Ethics'[43]:

> In the period leading up to the *Investigations*, [Wittgenstein] would try to set down the way he had thought about logic in the *Tractatus*. For example: 'In logic we have a *theory*, and this must be simple and neat, for I want to know that whereby language is language. That all this which we call language has imperfections and slag on it, I agree, but I want to come to know *that* which *has* been adulterated. That whereby I am able to *say something*.' What the *Tractatus* says of 'the real sign' (*das eigentliche Zeichen*) or 'the real proposition' would illustrate this. And there is a similar tendency in what it says of ethics. 'The Ethical', which cannot be expressed, is that whereby I am able to think of good and evil at all, even in the impure and nonsensical expressions I have to use.
>
> In the *Tractatus* he would consider different ways of saying something, in order to find what is essential to its expression. As we can see what the various ways of expressing it have in common, we can see what is arbitrary in each of them and distinguish it from what is necessary. Near the beginning of the *Lecture on Ethics* he says: 'if you look through the row of synonyms which I will put before you, you will, I hope, be able to see the characteristic features which they all have in common and these are the characteristic features of Ethics.'
>
> When he wrote the *Brown Book* he would constantly describe 'different ways of doing it', but he did not call them different ways of saying the same thing. Nor did he think we could reach the heart of the matter by seeing what they all have in common. He did not see them as so many fumbling attempts to say what none of them ever does say perfectly. The variety is important – not in order to fix your gaze on the unadulterated form, but to keep you from looking for it.

Rhees here describes a profound change in Wittgenstein's thinking about logic, language, and the possibility of 'saying something'. The change is a change in Wittgenstein's understanding of the differences in the ways people speak and so, we might say, in his understanding of the different forms that understanding can take in different people's lives. Wittgenstein gives up the search for 'the unadulterated form' behind such differences. But Rhees's description of this change does not, I think, make it immediately clear why that search ought to be abandoned. The description was not, I think, intended to make that clear. But the result is that it is not immediately evident how attention to 'differences' – attention to the 'variety' – is supposed to 'keep me' from looking for 'the unadulterated form', especially if it was those differences that led me to look for it in the first place. Just how those differences might in fact send one off on such a search is brought out by Rhees in this same essay when he reports Wittgenstein as saying:

> 'People have had the notion of an ethical theory – the idea of finding the true nature of goodness or of duty. Plato wanted to do this – to set ethical enquiry in the direction of finding the true nature of goodness – so as to achieve objectivity and avoid relativity. He thought relativity must be avoided at all costs, since it would destroy the *imperative* in morality.'[44]

But, again, if a concern over an apparent relativity in ethical judgements arises – as it commonly seems to do – in face of the variety of conceptions of 'the moral' found among human beings, how is contemplation of that variety itself to keep me from looking for 'the unadulterated form' – unless, perhaps, I have *already* come to look upon that variety differently. Apparently, what I need to do is to recognize that talk of an 'unadulterated' form or essence is an expression of some misunderstanding. The difficult thing is to see how the evident variety in ways of speaking about the 'moral' or the 'ethical' can be understood neither as obscuring an 'unadulterated' form nor as leading us into 'relativism'.

I have given so lengthy a quotation from Rhees in order to set the developments in Wittgenstein's view of ethics that are the subject of Rhees's essay in the context of Wittgenstein's more general concerns in philosophical logic, which appears to have been Rhees's own point in the quoted passage. He is bringing out the sense in which the problem of 'relativity' in moral judgements is in many respects only a special case of a more general scepticism that can leave me wondering whether it is possible to 'say something' at all. Wittgenstein's concern to find 'that whereby I am able to *say something*' arises, I take it, from the apparent possibility that despite the words or sentences that I appear to use well enough, the language I speak might somehow fail to get at the reality of things.[45] But a search for the 'form' or 'essence' of 'the moral' or of 'the good', like any search for the form or essence by which I am able to say anything at all, cannot be what we would normally call an 'empirical' search, meaning by that the sort of search involved in determining whether there are any shoes in my closet or any signs of life on Mars. The problem of correct identification here belongs to 'logic', at least in the sense in which Wittgenstein remarks that 'essence is expressed by grammar.'[46] If the 'unadulterated form' is somehow behind or beneath the 'imperfections' and 'slag' that belong to the grammars of the languages people actually speak, I may well wonder how any 'unadulterated' form or essence is to be identified at all. To say that 'essence' is expressed by 'grammar' is to acknowledge that I cannot identify any such essence apart from the grammar of a language that people actually speak. I take this to be Rhees's point in *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* when he remarks that Protagoras would have been right to reject 'the idea of some criterion for intelligibility' or some 'definition of a language' which is 'behind or beyond what people actually practice'.[47] And there is no reason to think he would say anything different about a search for a definition of the 'ethical' or the 'moral'. Yet when Phillips has himself rejected such a criterion, this seems to have led others to criticize him for 'conceptual relativism', the view that 'there is no way things are except relative to some conceptual scheme'.[48]

Sometimes, I think, Phillips does speak in ways that suggest some kind of relativism. For example, in his 'Postscript' to Rhees's *Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty': There, Like Our Life*, he speaks of the possibility of a 'fundamental disparity' in 'the way things are *taken*' (my italics).[49] But it seems clear enough in *The Hermeneutics of Contemplation* that he thinks it confused to say 'there is no way things are except in relation to some conceptual scheme'. The confusion is in the idea that 'the language in which we express our beliefs, true or false, is itself a set of beliefs about reality'.[50] In rejecting such a notion as confused, he is not only rejecting the notion that there is some same 'reality' that different languages attempt to describe in different ways, but also the notion that they attempt to describe different realities. He follows Peter Winch in insisting that different languages 'do not describe anything at all'.[51] This does seem a clear enough rebuttal of 'conceptual relativism'. If the language I speak is not itself a description of anything, then clearly it will be confused to speak of 'things' standing 'in relation to' conceptual schemes. What is not clear, I think, is that this will serve as much of a response to the scepticism of which Rhees takes philosophy to be 'the enemy'.

There is surely something right in the idea that the language I speak is not itself a description of anything – at least not in the way that a map can be said to describe a terrain, an analogy that Rhees explicitly rejects:

> You can check a map to see whether it is accurate by looking outside it. But you cannot check language to see whether it is accurate by looking outside it.[52]

And, again, it may seem fair enough to suggest that a failure to see what is wrong with such talk is often behind the failures of philosophers[53] and social scientists[54] to do justice to the variety of forms that understanding can take in the lives of human beings. And that is itself to say that those failures are often rooted in confusions about the nature of language and, in particular, about what is often spoken of as the 'relation' between language and reality – precisely the sort of issues that Rhees identifies among the central problems of philosophy.[55] But just as there are differences in what Rhees and Phillips identify as the object of philosophical wonder, so here there are differences in the concerns that commonly show when each talks of these central problems. Rhees's concerns center not so much on the bearing of these problems upon our understanding of one another or upon our understanding of the differences or distances that can separate us but on the bearing of these same problems upon our sense for the reality of our own individual lives. What is more, it is just here that his concern with these issues shows itself to be so very 'personal', as, for example, in the thoughts he imagines himself expressing thus:

> 'The importance of laws of reason or of thought is not simply that you could not make yourself understood to other people except you follow them; it is rather that you could not have any understanding yourself. The possibility of understanding is not simply the possibility of communicating. It is the possibility of distinguishing waking from nightmare.'[56]

He comments:

> That is why philosophy has been in a way a matter of much more personal concern than science has. A matter of settling one's own difficulties; of coming from darkness into light – where this is a personal darkness and a personal light.

Philosophy is a matter of more personal concern because philosophical problems, unlike problems in the sciences, are 'problems which leave you wondering where you are . . . taking all the reality out of things . . .'[57]:

> Suppose we said that the 'point' of language or of speaking was intelligibility, or understanding. That that is what you learn when you learn to speak. The philosophical difficulties expressed in scepticism seem to call all that in question; call in question the possibility of *learning* anything in that sense – the possibility of understanding people. The possibility of saying anything. The possibility of learning or of growing wiser. The possibility of the growth of understanding. It is in *this* sense of doubting whether it makes any difference what you say – not doubting whether there is any difference in meaning between one statement and another. That is rather important. Whether it makes any difference what you say – whether there is any point in it anyway; whether there is any point in saying anything anyway.[58]

Rhees here identifies a scepticism that is not, I think, to be answered by any insistence that the language I speak is not a description of anything. To the contrary, it may seem only to be bolstered by talk of 'different languages' or of 'world-pictures' and 'perspectives' – despite any denials that these are themselves descriptions of anything. No doubt there is an important sense in which the language I speak is not a description or map of anything. And this may be sufficient reason to say, as Rhees does, that the language I speak is not 'responsible to anything', at least not to anything to which it might be judged 'adequate' or 'inadequate'.[59] So one may agree as well that it is confused to ask whether my own or anyone else's 'world-picture' is either 'adequate' or 'inadequate'.[60] But, again, this may seem only to make all the more doubtful what Rhees calls 'growth of understanding', the kind of growth that scepticism, as he sees it, calls into question. For surely none of this talk of different 'languages' or 'world-pictures' or 'perspectives' rules out the possibility of 'movement' from one to another 'language' or 'world-picture' or 'perspective'. To the contrary, such movement seems to be just the sort of change that over many years preoccupied Phillips in his own writings.[61] Thus, in *The Hermeneutics of Contemplation* he remarks that we 'need to see the importance of the distinction between making a mistake within a moral or religious viewpoint, and coming to regard one's viewpoint as mistaken.'[62] No doubt, any account of these two possibilities will require two very different conceptions of ‘mistaken’, and in of his ‘Afterward’ to Rhees’s *Wittgenstein’s ‘On Certainty’: There Like Our Life*,[63] he suggests that a change from one ‘world-view’ to another ‘would be more like an initiation than the correction of a mistake.’ But while a good deal might be said to fill out the notion of ‘initiation’ here, what I am in the course of arguing is that, in relation to the scepticism that is Rhees’s concern, nothing will quite be enough as long as we do talk of change or movement from or into a ‘world-view’ or a ‘world-picture’. The mere possibility of movement from one ‘world-view’ or ‘world-picture’ to another may leave me wondering in what sense it matters what I do say or what ‘language’ I do speak. For insofar as there is no sense to the judgement that any given world-view or world-picture is the right one, there does not seem to be any sense to the judgement that this or that world-view or world-picture is better than another. Harking back to Rhees’s talk of ‘growth of understanding’ in the last passage I quoted from *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse,* the point might be put by asking whether growth of understanding must be growth within a ‘language’ or ‘world-view’. It may be that a person who comes to have a different world-picture or comes to speak a different ‘language’ will want to say that he or she has grown in understanding and so has come to a better ‘perspective’. But it is hard to see how this could be anything but a confused expression of the fact that he or she has come to that new perspective. Whatever such a person might want to say, what philosophy seems to say again and again is that there is no sense to talk of better or worse here, given that there is no sense to talk of a ‘more correct’ or ‘more mistaken’ ‘language’ or ‘perspective’. Which, again, is precisely what may lead one to wonder what difference it really makes that I have the perspective or world-view that I do have. I am suggesting that it should instead lead us to question in what sense, if any, actual individuals have ‘perspectives’ or ‘world-views’ at all.[64]

IV

I have tried to indicate how some of the difficulties that motivate Rhees’s criticisms of Wittgenstein – difficulties connected with the problem of skepticism – also arise in connection with Phillips’s talk of ‘world-views’ and ‘perspectives’. Those criticism themselves, I believe, turn on what Rhees calls ‘the problem of the particular and the general in language’, as I shall now try to make clear. Rhees thinks, as Phillips himself brings out well,[65] that much of Wittgenstein's talk of rules of language and of language-games may leave us with 'too external' an account of language, and so with an account of understanding that is inadequate to the challenge of the scepticism of which Rhees says that philosophy is 'the enemy'. But the point is not at all that Rhees sees no merit in Wittgenstein's talk of rules of language and of language-games and forms of life. As he observes in 'Some Developments in Wittgenstein's View of Ethics', if I am to say of a judgement that it is a 'moral' or an 'ethical' judgement, there must be some 'grounds' for my doing so: 'There must be grounds for saying that people who follow a particular system are making ethical judgements: that they regard this or that as good, and so forth', though, as he insists, it does not follow that what those people say must be an expression of something more ultimate.[66] The point is that without such 'grounds' there would be no distinction between using the words 'moral' or 'ethical' rightly and using them wrongly. In this sense, then, there must be rules for the use of these terms. And yet no statement of such a rule can tell me its own application. Thus Wittgenstein at *Philosophical Investigations* #201:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.

When Wittgenstein goes on to say that our troubles here show 'that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases', he is drawing us back to the sense in which obeying a rule is a 'custom'[67] or, as he had put it in *Philosophical Investigations,* #202, a 'practice'. But not, he wants to say, a practice I could engage in in 'logical privacy', for that would do away with any distinction between my thinking I was obeying a rule and my actually obeying it.[68] Hence, to act in accord with a rule – to use a word in its meaning and so to say something – is to participate in an activity involving us – some 'us' – in common 'judgements':

> If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.[69]

I take it that this seems to abolish logic because logic was supposed to guide me in my judgements.[70] Logic was to tell me what *can* be said or thought, what follows and does not follow from anything I do say. But if a rule cannot tell me its own application, and so I must fall back to some ‘agreement in judgements’, it may seem that I will be falling back to an agreement in ‘opinions’, an agreement in opinions as to what is ‘in accord with the rule’. And while Wittgenstein famously remarks that agreement in the language people use ‘is not agreement in opinions but in form of life’,[71] it is also true, as Rhees remarks, that Wittgenstein did not make very explicit or very detailed what might be included in this idea.[72] Rhees himself thinks that it will be very easy to go wrong here if we think that to imagine a language is to imagine what we might call a ‘way of life’.[73] But he also rejects talk of language as an ‘institution’[74] or as an ‘instrument’[75] or even as an ‘activity’ – at least if you take building or marketing as examples of activities.[76] So, too, he objects to the idea that the ability to speak is ‘a matter of being able to follow a rule’.[77] If the problem, then, is that all of these ways of speaking may leave us with what Rhees calls ‘too external’ an account of language,[78] we need to understand what ‘too external’ means here; and that, I take it, turns in large part on Rhees’s distinction between ‘understanding what is said’ and ‘knowing the rule for the use of the expression’:

> Understanding what is said, does not simply mean knowing the rule for the use of the expression. If you thought it did, you would not have understood what was meant by speaking of a rule for the use of an expression at all, or by a rule of language.[79]

You might, for example, be confusing a rule of language with a rule in a calculus:

> In a calculus, I suppose you might say that if he knows how to use all the expressions involved, and that if he is familiar with all the procedures, then he ought to be able to follow the calculation. He ought to be able to follow a mathematical argument. But in connexion with ordinary discourse or discussion it is not just like that.[80]

It is not just like that in ‘ordinary discourse’ because in ordinary discourse you say something, whereas ‘in mathematics you do not say anything’.[81] The difference ‘has to do with the fact that in mathematics you can calculate what can be said’.[82] You do not say anything because what ‘makes sense’ in a calculation is entirely determined by the calculus – and not by the context, let alone the particular speaker.[83] That is part of the sense of saying that you can ‘apply’ a calculus: what is applied in this or that context is not itself affected by the context. Adding up oranges is no different from adding up fatalities in a train wreck – as ‘adding’. But Rhees wants to say that what a person says in a conversation does get its sense from the context. If we are discussing the fatalities in a train wreck, I will be completely baffled if you suddenly tell me that you ate oranges at breakfast this morning. ‘What is the point of saying *that*?’ In fact, it is just this connection between the sense of what you say and the context in which you say it that suggests that saying something is more like making a move in a game than it is like calculating.

It makes sense for a batter to bunt with a runner on first and nobody out – but with a runner on first and two men out we should perhaps say, ‘It depends’. What kind of bunter is this batter? How deep is the infield playing? But even if saying something is more like making a move in a game than it is like doing sums, still, a game is something ‘apart’ from people’s lives, as a conversation is not.[84] A conversation, as Rhees would say, is about something and so is connected with and makes a difference to the conversants’ lives outside the conversation. The playing of a game is not in this way connected with and does not in this way make a difference to the lives of the players outside the game. As Rhees observes, even in the case of a professional player, for whom the game is not a mere diversion, ‘what happens in the game is not about – it does not have to do with, *it does not get its sense from* – what happens in the rest of his life’.[85] His point, I take it, is that a conversation about painting a house or about performing surgery – ‘Don’t you really need to use oil-based paint for this surface?’; ‘Should we put the surgery off for another week?’ – is not a game precisely because of the connections of meaning between the things said in these conversations and the rest of life.[86] What it means to say that oil-based paint is ‘the only real choice here’ is essentially connected to the point we see in painting houses at all. And this fact points to a difference between learning to play a game and learning to speak a language. If what is said in a conversation or discussion gets its sense from the context – i.e., from something outside the conversation itself – then I cannot learn to converse or to discuss without some understanding of things outside the conversation. When Rhees speaks of an account of language as too ‘external’ he means that it is an account according to which one might engage in conversation without that understanding of the connections between what is said and the rest of life as that is lived by those engaged in the conversation.[87] But in that respect, it will not be an account of language or of taking part in a conversation at all. Perhaps it will be closer to an account of what it is to take part in the sort of ‘pretend conversation’ one might have in learning a foreign language. But Rhees’s point is that in such a ‘pretend conversation’ no one really says anything at all:

> If you are giving me a lesson in a foreign language, we may carry on a sham conversation to give me the opportunity of constructing appropriate sentences and giving appropriate replies. Neither of us learns anything from what is said in a sham conversation of this kind, because neither of us really tells the other anything. And unless there were the distinction between genuine speaking and sham or pretence, then speaking *would* be nearly like playing the game correctly. You could say what you have been trained to say without telling anyone anything.[88]

Or, as he remarks somewhat later:

> If you just learned the rules and learned how to construe odd remarks, or if it were really something like learning a game, and your teacher said, ‘Now let’s play. I’ll move here . . .’ etc., or: ‘Now let’s play. I’ll say this. Now what are you going to say?’ this would be a game, all right, and what you say would be determined by what is possible according to the rules, and by what you could think of. But there would be no reality in it, and neither of us would be telling one another anything.[89]

The ‘reality’ of an actual conversation comes with the fact that you are talking about something, so that what you say is determined by something outside the ‘rules for the use of expressions’ and whatever you happen to think of. But that means that there comes into play a person’s understanding of whatever it is that the conversation is actually about, which is why, having recognized a distinction between ‘understanding what is said’ and ‘knowing the rule for the use of the expression’, we have to notice a further ambiguity in ‘understanding what is said’:

> ‘I understand what he said, but I could not see the point of saying *that*. Why didn’t he tell us that Napolean lost the battle of Waterloo, or something?’ So in one sense of ‘understanding what he said’, you did not understand it; or as we say, you did not understand him. It just meant nothing to you.[90]

Where I cannot see ‘the point of saying *that’* I cannot see how what he said belonged to the conversation. It seems he might just as well have told us that Napolean lost at Waterloo. On the other hand, I may also be baffled by what a person says because what he says seems so obvious that it could not have been worth saying – unless, perhaps, we are not really talking about the same thing. But that in fact is what is important about each of these possibilities, namely, that each points up not only the way in which a real conversation involves a common understanding of something outside the conversation – and so of something more than might be captured by any account of the rules for the use of the expressions that are found in the conversation – but also what sort of limits there may be to that common understanding. That is, each of these cases brings out the way in which a real conversation involves the speakers' *particular* understandings of what the conversation is about. In a real conversation, a conversation in which there is no question about a person's mastery of 'the rules for the use of expressions', if I am puzzled by something another person says, this will not normally be because I need an explanation of what her words mean or how those words are commonly used, as may well be the case in the sort of practice conversation that goes with learning a foreign language. In a real conversation I will ordinarily want to ask what *she* meant by those words or why she said that. The point will be to understand what she is saying, to understand her, where 'understanding her' is not a matter of understanding 'people in general'. So while we do speak of understanding 'what the words mean' and 'what people usually mean when they say that', there is also a question that may be asked about what *she* meant when she said it. In understanding her I have not understood everyone or anyone else who might 'say such a thing'. In fact, to understand her is to see her as someone who can bring something to a conversation,[91] and not merely as a representative of a 'perspective' or 'world-view'. It is to recognize what I want to call 'the particularity of meaning'. Thus Rhees remarks:

> Other people may repeat what Leonidas or Caesar or Napolean or Bismarck said on a particular occasion. But they are not making the remark themselves. Even where similar situations recur and people say the same thing ('Will you marry me?'), then in one sense it is not the same remark.[92]

Even where people say the same thing, they do not say the same thing – and not merely because 'you' and 'me' signify different individuals. Six months or three years later it may well be a genuine question what *he* was saying when he said 'marry'. But while a person may say something in a conversation that makes me wonder what he could mean by it and so makes me wonder whether we are really talking about the same thing, I may wonder in a very different way in yet a different sort of case. This is the sort of case in which I am quite sure that you did *not* mean what I took your *words* to mean, precisely because in that case what you said would have been just foolish: ‘He can’t have meant that; that would have been just silly.’[93] Rhees comments about the puzzlement that may occur in trying to understand what is said in the Bible:

> And if I raise objections and criticisms, it is not because I think that what I read there is stupid; although it may be because I cannot see clearly what the difference is between what is said there and something that *would* be stupid, or at least open to obvious objections.[94]

I have said that to understand a person is to see that person as someone who can ‘bring something’ to the conversation. In some cases it may just be information that a person brings, but even then the person will have to understand the relevance of that information to the conversation. Still, it is a different sort of case that Rhees describes when he speaks of reading the Bible. The case of the Bible brings out the connection between the particularity of meaning and the possibility of a kind of learning distinct from the gathering of information, a learning in which I come to see sense where previously I did not. No doubt, this sort of learning would not be possible if there were no ‘rules of language’. But it seems to depend as much on, again, what I am calling ‘the particularity of meaning’. In this way it brings into view the problem of ‘the particular and the general’ in language:

> You can understand what is said even though it is not said to you; you can understand what is written here although it was not written for you (and has nothing to do with the situation in which you are); you can understand what is told in a story or what is recited in a play, even though it is not written or uttered for anyone in that sense at all.
>
> And I say this creates a difficulty, because it makes it seem as though learning to understand – or learning to understand what is said – is *not* like, or need not be like, learning to understand people.[95]

And shortly thereafter:

> Part of the difficulty about the particular and the general, or the particular and generality in language has to do with grammar and vocabulary of course. When people are speaking, they are always saying something which, so far, seems to be as particular as the particular steps they take or strokes they strike. And on the other hand, they say it in this vocabulary and grammar.[96]

If there were no generality in language nothing could be said. But too great an emphasis on the general gives us what Rhees objects to as ‘too external’ an account of saying something – and that means 'too external' an account of understanding what is said. We get an account that makes speaking seem like the application of a technique,[97] with the result that we take the 'reality' out of a discussion or conversation.[98] The reality in a discussion is connected with the fact that the conversation is about something and so depends on our having some common understanding of something outside the conversation. On the other hand, if we had nothing but a common understanding, then, I think, there would be no discussion in that case either, for there would be nothing to learn. The point seems to me particularly important if we go on to ask what it is that we need a common understanding of in order to have a discussion or conversation. So, for example, you might be able to distinguish between oil-based paint and latex paint without seeing the point of using one rather than the other. For that, you would need to see the connection between the results of using one or the other and the point – or various points – behind our painting houses at all. And yet that is itself connected with the point of our living in houses and so with the various considerations that go into living in the sorts of houses we do live in – all of which considerations open up possibilities of disagreement and perhaps of incomprehension. I take it that this is, roughly, the line of thinking that leads Rhees to say that a dialogue 'makes sense – or anything that is said has sense – only if living has sense; not otherwise'.[99] He recognizes plenty of difficulties that come with saying this. But if I can bring out the sense in which whatever 'sense' living has cannot be identified with any 'perspective' or 'world-picture' but is instead more particular and so more personal than such expressions are likely to suggest, I can perhaps being out something of what Rhees may have learned as a person from philosophical contemplation.

V

> Whether living has sense – this is rather like asking whether understanding is possible. Not only 'rather like'; it is the same question. To see this is the same as seeing how discourse is possible.[100]

So to say that discourse is possible is to say that understanding is possible, and to say that understanding is possible is to say that 'living has sense'. But this suggests that 'Living has sense' takes us no further than 'Understanding is possible'. Indeed, Rhees himself remarks parenthetically, 'If we said, "Understanding is possible if living has sense", that would amount to:

"Understanding is possible if understanding is possible."'[101] On the other hand, by speaking of 'whether living has sense', Rhees emphasizes that there is nothing of what he means by 'understanding' here without what he calls 'understanding life'.[102] As he puts it:

> [Y]ou can understand what is said only if you can understand the discourse in which it enters. In other words, if you can talk of the meaning of things, or the sense of things, or the reality (point) of things.[103]

No doubt children say things and understand things said to them while having little or nothing of what we might call 'an understanding of life'. Nor is speaking always 'discourse' or discussion and, in fact, generally, it is not.[104] Moreover, we do speak of 'communication' between even machines[105] and between animals.[106] But machines do not in the relevant sense 'speak to one another' or 'say anything', if only because they do not understand anything they 'say'; and they do not understand anything they 'say' because they have no lives in which it matters to do or say one thing or another, so that 'for them' there is nothing that their 'talk' is about. So, too, while we do speak of animals living together, this has not the sense it has when we speak of human beings living together:

> When we speak of human beings as living together, we think of them as understanding or trying to understand, and misunderstanding one another. We think of the tasks and difficulties and satisfactions of living together. And whether they can make a go of it depends on whether they can keep some sort of understanding. But for animals there is nothing to understand, in this way. Animals may have regular companionship, as they may also have mates, and they may keep together or they may fall out. But there is no question of understanding here, any more than there is any question of discussion.[107]

In many respects, there is often little question of discussion with children either. But in learning to speak, they are learning to discuss – or they are not. But if it is the latter, then to that extent they will not know what they are saying, nor, often enough, will they understand what is being said to them:

> If someone learns to speak, he does not just learn to make sentences and utter them, nor to react to orders either. He learns to say something. He learns what can be said; he learns – however fumblingly – what it makes sense to say. . . . And to do this he must learn how remarks hang together, how they may bear on one another.[108]

Part of what this means is that in learning to speak one becomes involved with the questions, criticisms and objections that belong to trying to understand a given remark. For trying to understand a given remark is trying to see how it belongs to the conversation or discussion, and that means trying to see how it is connected with what we are talking about. But the notion of ‘what we are talking about’ takes us to Rhees’s talk of seeing the ‘sense’ of things or the ‘point’ of things. Or, perhaps, not doing so, in which case the discussion itself will seem pointless and I will not understand what is being said, even if I understand ‘what the words mean’.

Rhees’s point, then, is not that I cannot say anything or discuss anything unless I see the sense or point of ‘life’. Rather, his point seems to be very much Plato’s point that the sophists were ‘in darkness about what speaking is’ – even while they could speak:

> They were ‘estranged from that with which they have most constant intercourse’ – without understanding of their own speech or thinking. And yet of course they did understand what is said to them, in ordinary matters anyway, as well as Plato did, and they could answer as clearly.[109]

Rhees thinks that on Socrates’s view I would reveal this sort of ‘estrangement’ when I found myself unable to answer questions or meet objections to or criticisms of what I did say.[110] Part of the trouble with all of this, however, is precisely that in ordinary matters or perhaps in various skills and techniques, or even in what some people understand by ‘science’, we do seem to have cases that are so much more obviously cases of understanding than anything that Rhees seems to mean by ‘understanding life’. One big reason why they are more obviously cases of understanding is that the measure of anyone’s possession of such ‘understanding’ is itself so much more obvious:

> There are certainly difficulties in connexion with the notion of the measure of this understanding. In other circumstances we can ask how one would find out whether he had understood or not; we can give a pretty straightforward account of what it would mean to say that he had *mis*understood; we can speak of criteria and so on. But in the present case it is by no means so clear what it would mean to say that someone had misunderstood.[111]

But he also sees a problem in the notion that the sorts of understanding for which we have a measure can stand as ‘understanding’ without the sort for which the measure is not nearly so obvious. For without the latter understanding, the former seem to break down as cases of understanding. So, for example, if the skills and arts acknowledged by the sophists are to be skills and arts, they must belong to a life – where 'belong to' signifies the having of some intelligible relation to what else belongs to that life, i.e., what else has an intelligible relation to that life. That is part of what it means to say that they are skills and arts. But the relation they do have to that life must also be distinct from the relation between, say, mere diversions or forms of entertainment and the rest of that life. But even to see such a distinction requires some conception of the sense of things or the point of things. In particular, it requires some conception of 'better' and 'worse' in the practice of those skills or arts that is different from any 'better' or 'worse' that belongs to the playing of a game. That means seeing their 'point' as somehow distinct from the point of any game. And part of what is important here is that if I could give an account of 'better' and 'worse' in the practice of a particular skill or technique it could not itself be given solely in terms of another and perhaps more 'comprehensive' skill or technique. For that would in turn call for a similar account, and one that could not itself, then, be given solely in terms of 'competence' or 'proficiency'. This is at least part of what leads Rhees, as he thinks it led Plato, to speak of 'growth of understanding':

> The sophists evidently thought that one should speak only of the growth and multiplication of competence. Plato was talking about growth in a different sense. I suppose about understanding in a different sense also. As regards growth: we have the question of what the difference is between that and addition to a collection. I suppose it should be growth of what was there: development of that, and alteration of that. Not simply addition to it, leaving it as it was. The importance of unity again. One and not many ('Knowledge of many things does not bring understanding'). Rather of coming to see things differently, of becoming wiser, not of learning more things or skills . . . [but] of understanding things or failing to understand them. And that was the kind of difference that Plato spoke of as the difference between waking and dream, of passing from illusion and twilight and darkness into light.[112]

Competence and proficiency leave me with the question of the 'point' of one's having or developing such competence or proficiency. And 'seeing the point' here seems to be a matter of seeing these activities in connection with the rest of 'life'. Thus, as Rhees says, 'the importance of unity again'. But, no doubt, where the understanding is not a matter of competence or proficiency, it may seem unclear what it really amounts to. And this may lead to the idea that if you really have any such understanding of 'life', then you ought to be able to say what it is, which will itself lead to trouble.

Suppose I want to say that Rhees himself shows a remarkable understanding of 'life'. That does not mean that any particular expression of it will be intelligible to just anyone at all. Neither, however, does it mean that any particular expression of it will amount to a description of it. In an important sense, there can be no description of it. If I think Rhees shows a profound understanding of life or of philosophy, this will show in what he says, and in his writings. But any description of the understanding that does show there will have a generality to it that Rhees's own remarks and writings will belie. That is part of the point of going back to his own words, his own way of making a point, again and again. But even here, there can be no 'complete' representation of his understanding, because such understanding is itself something that shows not only in what Rhees has said, but also in what he would say. And the problem with that is not merely that death has put an end to his saying anything. The point applies to anyone living. It is tempting to say that the point is simply that understanding is itself a living thing. It shows in what a person says and does. But what a person says and does turns on what it is that he or she finds intelligible and unintelligible. And there can be no description of that distinction simply because there can be no saying in advance what a person will say, and not merely because we could only guess at which of the available options he might choose. There is no sense to such a notion of 'available options'. In reply to the objection that if you can tell the difference between intelligible discourse and nonsense, then surely you can say what the difference is, Rhees remarks:

> If you raise that objection, then you have not seen what discourse is. (You have not seen the difference between language and a wallpaper pattern.) You have not seen that language should actually be spoken and understood.[113]

You have not seen that language should be spoken and understood insofar as you have not seen that the attempt to say 'what makes language intelligible'[114] is itself an instance of 'thought trying to catch its own tail'.[115] The distinction between sense and nonsense shows in the fact that you can say something. But to persist in asking for an account of that distinction is to fail to see that the reality of that distinction belongs to the lives that are lived by individuals and not to anything that could be described, including any 'world-view' or 'world-picture' or 'form of life' or 'way of life'. Rhees writes:

> Perhaps there is some confusion between life and a *way* of living (or form of life). The unity of life is not the unity of a form. Any more than it is the unity of

> a skill or of an operation. It seems as though a way of life were something you could describe – 'this is what people do' – rather as you might describe a game or a complicated technique; a performance of some sort. 'All these things form part of a way of life.' 'They do that. That belongs to the way they live.'[116]

But no one, we might say, lives a 'way of life'. For the very conception of any way of life is an abstraction derived from the lives people actually live. But as an abstraction it must leave behind the particularity of meaning and so the particularity of understanding that make the lives of those individuals the lives that they are.[117] The point might be put by saying that what makes any life a *life* is the fact that an individual's understanding is not the 'common' understanding presented in any account of a 'way of life'.[118] Precisely because an individual's understanding is not 'common' there is the possibility of his saying something new and so of my learning from him. But the possibility of my learning from him itself turns on the fact that my understanding is 'incomplete'. If it were 'complete' there just would not be any possibility of learning. There would be no possibility of growth,[119] for I would 'have it all figured out'. But to see what it is to speak and to understand is to see the sense in which there is not even such an 'all' to have here. On the other hand, if we say that 'growth of understanding' is always possible, that may itself raise questions about the sort of understanding Rhees is talking about. Perhaps my whole world can be turned upside down, as Callicles feared would happen to his world if he took Socrates seriously. And in that case, what is to be said of the 'understanding' I now have?

I expect that the first thing Rhees might say is that nonetheless it is understanding:

> The understanding that you gain as you learn language. Not something that is given in the books or in manuals. 'What is it that you have, when you have achieved it, then?' You are able to speak and understand people. That does not mean: you are master of a technique.[120]

You are able to speak and to understand people. That is to say, you have something to say and can understand people when they speak to you. You can understand what individuals say and so can learn something from them. But not just 'information'. For, again, it is not the case that 'I know the meaning of the sentence, so I know what you are saying'[121]:

> Suppose I repeat Caesar's remark. 'It is because the words have those meanings, that you have only to repeat it in order to tell me what he said.' The words

> which Jesus used on the cross were the words of Isaiah. The words which the judge uses in pronouncing sentence. An exclamation like 'Fire!' The repetition of a proverb (A rolling stone gathers no moss).[122]

I can come to see sense where I did not see it before, or I may see that what I thought made sense does not. But you cannot do justice to what I come to see or even to what I have left behind if you talk of all of this in terms of 'movement' or 'change' from one world-view or perspective to another. That is to leave out precisely the understanding I had and the understanding I have come to. It is to see only change or movement, but not growth: '[G]rowth of what was there: development of that, and alteration of that. Not simply addition to it, leaving it as it was.'[123] Nor simply replacement of it with something else. Perhaps the reality of such growth is best seen in the fact that I may come to see sense where I did not or come to see that what I thought made sense does not, not only by listening to others. I can also learn in this way from what I find myself saying. The 'reality' of discussion lies in both of these possibilities. The idea of 'what I find myself saying' is connected with the fact that the distinction between sense and nonsense is nothing that can be 'told' to me nor anything I can decide upon. In this sense, I discover it, which itself suggests a sense in which the language I speak is, after all, 'responsible' to something – even if not to anything in relation to which it could be judged 'adequate' or 'inadequate'. But perhaps this is just a way of saying that the difference between sense and nonsense is not arbitrary. Regarding the notion that it might be, Rhees remarks:

> Was this the sort of thing Plato was trying to emphasize? That the forms, or whatever else we are to include among the conditions of the possibility of discourse, may seem to be in some sense 'intellectual', in the sense that they do not belong to the physical objects which we see and handle. But on the other hand they are not products of our intellects or imaginary webs we weave in the air. They are not *idle* or *empty* principles – even though we cannot point to physical happenings in confirmation.[124]

Rhees goes on to consider an analogy between, on the one hand, sense and nonsense and, on the other hand, fact and fiction. Facts are what they are whether we like it or not. With the principles of grammar, or whatever we want to say makes the difference between sense and nonsense, we might want also to say that we are concerned with fact and not fiction. We do not just 'make them up'. And yet there is something wrong with the comparison. For nonsense, as Rhees points out, is not fiction, so that whatever we speak of as making for the distinction between sense and nonsense, 'it is a different kind of reality (from the reality of facts) and a different kind of correspondence'.[125] And yet the distinction is 'independent' of what I might like or I might choose. That is why Rhees thinks it absurd to suggest that anybody 'decided to make this sort of distinction between what has sense and what has not'. As he says, 'That distinction is presupposed in the whole notion of making a discussion (*sic*) of any kind.'[126]

When Rhees says that there is something wrong in speaking of the difference between sense and nonsense by analogy with fact and fiction, he says that there would be something wrong in suggesting that we discover this difference or that we investigate to find out what it is 'in the way in which we should investigate to find out what the facts are'.[127] But, again, the sense in which we do 'discover' it is a sense that goes with Rhees's own insistence that we do not decide on such things.[128] One may see an analogy here with Heraclitus's talk of listening 'not to me but to the *logos*' (Fragment 50), or with Plato's talk of 'listening' to 'the philosophical muse'.[129] Such an emphasis on listening can be seen as an expression both of the incompleteness of my own understanding and of the fact that there is something there to be understood. Perhaps it is this matter of the incompleteness of understanding that makes talk of 'blindness' or 'ignorance' seem more natural than talk of 'being mistaken' in accounts of this kind of learning. But the recognition of the incompleteness of understanding may also suggest a conception of the philosophical life as a life of that 'love of learning' so often referred to by Plato's Socrates.[130] It may also suggest a connection between the philosophical life and 'a certain humility', and a certain wonder. I mean, of course, wonder at 'the possibility of understanding', wonder that, for all its incompleteness, what I have and what others have is understanding. It is not difficult to see how the recognition of this could in turn be experienced as a passing – and a very personal one – 'from darkness to light'.[131]

NOTES

[1] D. Z. Phillips was born in 1934. He attended what was then University College, Swansea, and went on to Oxford, earning his M.A. there in 1961. After appointments at Queen's College, Dundee, at St. Andrew's and at University College, Bangor, he returned to Swansea in 1965 as a Lecturer in Philosophy. He became Professor and

Head of Department in 1971. In 1992 he was appointed Danforth Professor of Philosophy of Religion at what was then the Claremont Graduate School and thereafter divided his time between Claremont and Swansea where, in 1996, he became Rush Rhees Research Professor. He died in 2006.

[2] Ithaca, 1999. Hereafter CP.

[3] Cambridge, 2001. Hereafter HC.

[4] *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 202 (June 2001), p. 102.

[5] Phillips takes on a good deal of Rhees's language in these late writings, especially the language of Rhees's 'The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy', originally published in *Philosophical Investigations* (Vol. 17, No. 4, 1994) but now reprinted as the Preface to the second edition of Rhees's *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, edited by D. Z. Phillips (Oxford, 2006). All of my page references to this essay will be to the latter text. For instances of Phillips's adoption of Rhees's vocabulary, see, e.g., his talk of 'wonder' in philosophy in CP, pp. 55, 56 and 61 and Rhees's talk of wonder in *Fundamental Problems*, pp. xii and xiii; or Phillips's talk of the 'independence' of philosophy at PC, p. 44, and Rhees's at 'Fundamental Problems', pp. ix and x; or Phillips's talk of 'contemplation' itself at *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 2 and Rhees's at *Fundamental Problems*, p. xiii.

[6] HC*,* pp. 318-19.

[7] Ibid., p. 319.

[8] HC, p, 324 .

[9] Ibid., p. 319.

[10] *In Dialogue with the Greeks (Vol. II): Plato and Dialectic*, edited by D. Z. Phillips (Aldershot, 2004), p. 160.

[11] Ibid., p. 160.

[12] HC, p. 5.

[13] CP*,* p. 124.

[14] Ibid*.,* p. 55. And see HC*,* pp. 23-4, where Phillips speaks of 'wonder at the fact that people have thought about human life in *different* ways . . . '. (My emphasis.)

[15] Pp. xii-xiii. As noted above, this and all other quotations from this essay are taken from it as printed in *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse.* Hereafter WPD.

[16] CP, p. 56.

[17] Ibid.

[18] WPD, p. xii.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] That this was indeed a 'preoccupation' is especially evident, perhaps, in WPD and in the two volumes of *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, as will be made clear, I hope, below.

[22] Pp. viii-ix. And see p. xi where Rhees suggests a sense in which these central questions in philosophy are 'fundamental': not fundamental to philosophy, even if they are 'central' to it; but 'fundamental' in a way that questions in, say, science are not. These remarks suggest that the title 'The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy' may not quite hit the mark. See also p. xiii and note 26 below.

[23] Ibid., p. xiii.

[24] Volume 2, p. 39.

[25] See, e.g., ibid., pp. 40, 43-4 and 133.

[26] Ibid., pp. 39 and 44.

[27] WPD, p. xiii. Here, I take it, is some of what lies behind Rhees's conception of the 'central' questions of philosophy as 'fundamental' to other areas of inquiry.

[28] On this point see his discussions of the Pre-Socratics in Volume I of *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, especially Chapter One and, in particular, pp. 4-5.

[29] Ibid., p. viii.

[30] Ibid., p. xiii.

[31] Ibid.

[32] See *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, Vol. II, p. 40. But see also Rhees's remarks in the appendix to WPD (p. 264) on Wittgenstein's remark, 'In philosophy he wins the race who gets there last.' And compare, perhaps, Socrates's caution regarding his own 'eagerness' in discussion at *Phaedo*, 91a-c.

[33] E.g., at *Phaedo* 67b, 82c and d or *Phaedrus* 230d.

[34] See, e.g., WPD, pp. 14, 15-16 and 18. This is a point I shall return to below.

[35] See p. 130 and pp. 58-9.

[36] See CP, p. 130, as well as pp. 154-55 and 158.

[37] For an instance of the use of this last expression, see CP, pp. 54-5. For one example from among many of Phillips discussing such failures 'to do justice,' see CP, pp. 163-4.

[38] See, for example, *Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty': There Like Our Life* (edited by D. Z. Phillips, Oxford, 2003), pp. 64-5.

[39] Pp. 159-60.

[40] Rhees is explicit about the links between philistinism, sophistic argument and scepticism at p. 248 of the second volume of the latter work, though his understanding of those links is obvious, I should think, well before that.

[41] P. 254.

[42] For examples of such references see CP, pp. 130, 153 and 160, as well as Phillips's introduction to Rhees's *Moral Questions* (edited by D. Z. Phillips, London, 1999), pp. xvi-xvii.

[43] *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London, 1970), p. 102.

[44] Ibid., p. 100.

[45] See *Philosophical Investigations* (hereafter PI), #89: 'Logic lay, it seemed, at the bottom of all the sciences. – For logical investigation explores the nature of all things. It seeks to see to the bottom of things and is not meant to concern itself whether what actually happens in this or that. – It takes its rise, not from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connexions: but from an urge to understand the basis, or essence, of everything empirical.'

[46] PI, #371.

[47] P. 226.

[48] In HC, p. 292, Phillips refers to Nicholas Wolterstorff's 'Reformed Epistemology', in *Philosophy of Religion for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Phillips and Timothy Tessin (Basingstoke, 2001). Kai Nielsen raised the same criticism as long ago as 1971.

On this see Phillips in *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1986), p. 12.
[49] P. 181.
[50] P. 292.
[51] Ibid. p. 293.
[52] WPD, p. 37.
[53] See, for example, Phillips's criticisms of Bernard Williams and Richard Rorty in CP*,* pp. 65-70.
[54] See, for example, Phillips's discussion of the relation between the common idea that 'science corresponds to reality, but magic does not' and the notion that the language in which we express our beliefs is itself a 'set of beliefs about reality' in HC*,* p. 292 ff.
[55] WPD*,* p. ix.
[56] Ibid., p. 14.
[57] Ibid., p. 18.
[58] Ibid., p. 244
[59] Ibid., pp. 27, 178, 188, 245. I will return to this use of 'responsible' below.
[60] See Rhees at p. 65 of *Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty': There Like Our Life,* and see Phillips in the post-script to the same text, p. 170.
[61] From, for example, 'Belief and Loss of Belief' (*Sophia*, 1970, reprinted in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (Basingstoke, 1993)) to the concluding chapter of HC.
[62] HC*,* p. 324.
[63] P. 181.
[64] In his 'Afterward' to Rhees's *Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty': There Like Our Life* (p. 176), in the course of a discussion of Wittgenstein's use of the expression 'world-picture', Phillips wants to say that 'our world picture is not the foundation of the lives we lead, since it is the lives we lead which make our world-picture what it is.' 'World-picture' and 'our life' he says, 'go together': 'That is a central emphasis in Rhees's own work'. There is surely something right in this. He also goes on to speak (p. 179) of the sense in which, for Rhees, 'our language and our lives go together'. There is much that is right is this suggestion, as well. But what is right in it derives largely, I think, from Rhees's criticisms of Wittgenstein's talk of 'forms of life', something Phillips has little to say about in his 'Afterward' or, I think, elsewhere. He does mention Rhees's criticisms of Wittgenstein's use of 'form of life' in his introduction to *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p. xxxi. But he does not pursue the point.
[65] See both the introduction to WPD and the 'Afterward' to *Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty': There Like Our Life* . But see the previous note as well.
[66] P. 101.
[67] PI*,* #199.
[68] Ibid., #202.
[69] Ibid., #242.
[70] See, for example, ibid., #97.
[71] Ibid., #241.
[72] WPD*,* pp. 51 and 164.
[73] Ibid., p. 118.

[74] Ibid., pp. 45 and 186.
[75] Ibid., p. 27.
[76] Ibid., p. 45.
[77] Ibid., p. 46.
[78] Ibid., p. 119.
[79] Ibid., p. 87.
[80] Ibid., pp. 86-7.
[81] Ibid., p. 125.
[82] Ibid., p. 62.
[83] Ibid., p. 91.
[84] Ibid., p. 161 and pp. 168-9.
[85] Ibid., pp. 168-9.
[86] Ibid., p. 146.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., pp. 161-62.
[89] Ibid., p. 168.
[90] Ibid., p. 119.
[91] Ibid., p. 126.
[92] Ibid., p. 184.
[93] Ibid., p. 204.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., p. 182.
[96] Ibid., p. 183.
[97] Ibid., p. 88, and pp. 182-82.
[98] Ibid., p. 88.
[99] Ibid., p. 13. And see *In Dialogue with the Greeks*, Volume II, p. 159: 'Plato holds that where language and life are concerned, one has sense only if the other does – and *only* then.'
[100] WPD, p. 13.
[101] Ibid., p. 4.
[102] Compare what he says of Plato's conception of 'growth of understanding': 'If Plato spoke of 'understanding life', this may have thrown a certain light on what he meant; but it would not have been an answer to the question of the sophists, because for him the conception of 'life' and the conception of 'growth of understanding' were so nearly identical.' Ibid., p. 11.
[103] Ibid., pp. 11-12.
[104] Ibid., p. 69.
[105] Ibid., p. 115.
[106] Ibid., p. 148.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., p. 29.
[109] Ibid., p. 28.
[110] Ibid., p. 17. He sees problems with this idea. In particular, he thinks that it 'seems to lead to the idea of "philosophy as a science"'; but he also thinks it important insofar

as it stands in opposition to the 'practicality and philistinism which the sophists were purveying'. The latter is the main point in the present context, while the temptation to let the idea carry us to a conception of philosophy as 'science' is, in a sense, what the remainder of this essay works to avert.

[111] Ibid., p. 15.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., p. 11.

[114] Ibid., p. 94.

[115] Ibid., p. xx.

[116] Ibid., p. 118.

[117] I take it that this is at least part of what lies behind M. O'C. Drury's distinction between the sense in which there can be a science of psychology and the sense in which there cannot. See Chapter 2 of *The Danger of Words* (London, 1973).

[118] Whether in this essay I am only replying to Phillips's question to me about what is to be learned from philosophical contemplation with an answer he already had – which would in turn suggest that I did not understand his question in the first place – seems to me to turn on the question whether in the last two chapters of HC, Phillips appears to see the force of the point made in this sentence. And, in all honesty, I am not sure how to answer this question.

[119] See WPD, p. 93, on the reality of discussion as entailing the possibility of growth. The point is very much connected with the distinction between a conversation and a performance, on which see WPD, p. 81.

[120] Ibid., p. 244.

[121] Ibid., p. 184.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid., p. 15.

[124] Ibid., p. 247.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid. The text has 'discussion'. But I wonder if it should not be 'decision'.

[127] Ibid.

[128] But neither, he wants to say, is any of this a matter of 'metaphysical faith', as if one could ask 'whether perhaps reality does *not* correspond to language (or: whether no reality corresponds to language)'. See ibid., p. 36.

[129] *Philebus*, 67b.

[130] E.g., at *Phaedo* 67b and 82c-d or *Phaedrus* 230d.

[131] I am grateful to Heidi Northwood for helpful discussions of an earlier draft of this essay. I have also benefited from conversations with Christopher Edelman and Matthew Edelman regarding particular points in it.

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Chapter 7

İlham Dilman: The Reality of the Human

CHRYSSI SIDIROPOULOU

I

İlham Dilman joined the Philosophy Department at Swansea in 1961 and he remained an active member of it well after his retirement in 1997. As a student at Cambridge he had come in contact with Wittgenstein's philosophy through the work of John Wisdom. Later in Swansea through constant discussions with Rush Rhees he deepened his understanding of Wittgenstein. So Wittgenstein's philosophy was a major although by no means exclusive source of influence upon Dilman's thought. Naturally, then, one has to explore the nature of his intellectual debt to Wittgenstein in order to fully understand Dilman's own philosophy.[1]

In a short paper he was invited to contribute to *Philosophical Investigations*, the journal, for April 2001, along with others, on what Wittgenstein meant to him, Dilman writes that in his first two years as an undergraduate in Cambridge in the early 50s he was disappointed in philosophy as he found it there. It was not until his third year when he went to John Wisdom's lectures that philosophy came to life for him. He writes:

> I was looking for some sort of connection between philosophical problems and the difficulties of life; I wanted philosophy to relate to something more concrete, engage with something of significance in our lives, to throw some light on life, however indirectly.[2]

In response to the question, 'What does Wittgenstein mean to me?', Dilman says:

> Two of his several contributions to philosophy stand out for me. One is the development of a unique conception and way of doing philosophy, at once reflective and critical, but anti-theoretical. . . . To do philosophy one has to have problems, or at least be able to make other people's problems one's own. One has to be susceptible, vulnerable to them. He [Wittgenstein] was open to such

> conceptual problems as he was open to the difficulties of life. I suggested that this was no accident for him and characterizes his contribution. His second contribution consists in the way he tied philosophy, with its diversity of problems, to a *center* where language, logic, human life, the realities with which human beings engage in that life, and the mode of existence which they have in such engagements, are indissolubly connected. It is at this center that logic and epistemology merge, and philosophy, in some respects, becomes an *a priori* anthropology – 'remarks about the natural history of human beings.'[3]

I want to ask: what is the nature of Dilman's debt to Wittgenstein? He was not a disciple of Wittgenstein, nor did he like to be thought of as 'a follower of Wittgenstein'. In the same paper he writes: 'I am not a Wittgenstein scholar, nor a scholar of any kind.'[4] Certainly, Wittgenstein did influence Dilman and this influence must be acknowledged. What he himself says is that he has learnt much from Wittgenstein. He would say that what he learnt from Wittgenstein and also from John Wisdom and Rush Rhees helped him to find his own voice in philosophy and to be able to concentrate on his own problems. He has certainly written on Wittgenstein and on the problems Wittgenstein treated.

Especially his earlier books, *Induction and Deduction*, and *Matter and Mind*, helped him both to understand Wittgenstein better and to develop philosophically. But from then on he tried to do several things: (i) to deepen his understanding of philosophers he felt in sympathy with – e.g., Plato; (ii) to criticize philosophers whose work he thought was taking us in the wrong direction – e.g., Quine and Kripke; (iii) to try and bring out what is wrong with scientific psychology – e.g., in *Mind, Brain, and Behaviour: Discussions of B. F. Skinner and J. R. Searle* and in *Raskolnikov's Rebirth*: *Psychology and the Understanding of Good and Evil*, in his posthumous *The Self, the Soul, and the Psychology of Good and Evil* – as well as to bring out what is valuable in Freud's contribution to our understanding of human beings by separating it from what mars this contribution – e.g., in his three books on Freud; (iv) to go into questions that are of special interest to him – e.g., in *Love and Human Separateness*, in *Love: its Forms, Dimensions and Paradoxes*, in *Free Will* (which he would have preferred to entitle *Human Freedom in a World of Cause, Change and Necessity*), in *Existentialist Critiques of Cartesianism*, and in *The Self, The Soul and the Psychology* of *Good and Evil*; (v) to offer his own account of Wittgenstein's philosophy as in his *Language and Reality: Modern Perspectives on Wittgenstein* and *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution.*

Almost 30 years separate his first books on Wittgenstein, *Induction and Deduction* (1973), and *Matter and Mind* (1975), from his two later ones, *Language and Reality* (1998) and *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution* (2002). In the first two the discussions revolve around an analysis of philosophical scepticism: Can we know anything about the future?; Can there be a deductive guarantee that the methods developed by mathematicians will not be upset by the appearance of some case which they cannot accommodate?; Can we know physical objects – that they exist and what they are like?; Can we know other minds – that there are thinking, feeling beings other than ourselves – and what their thoughts and feelings are? In the last two the discussions address the question of metaphysical realism and linguistic idealism: Are the dimensions of reality that characterize the world in which we engage with what is to be found in these dimensions independent of our language and culture?; How are the world in which we live and the language that we speak, think in terms of, and characterize what we meet in the world, interrelated? These are clearly not just philosophical questions, but questions at the very center of philosophy as, indeed, Dilman argues.

But what about other questions he discusses in his books and papers? What does their philosophical character consist in? For example: How can the sexes communicate in love?; How can a person give himself or herself in love, give himself or herself to love, and still maintain his or her autonomy?; How can a person find himself or herself by turning away from himself or herself? Dilman not only discusses such questions, but also compares them with orthodox philosophical questions. Indeed his very treatment of them exhibits their philosophical character. However, here it is equally important to distinguish the conceptual difficulty which the philosophical question articulates and the personal difficulty which has its source in an affective orientation. Thus in his chapter 'Proust: Human Separateness and the Longing for Union' he both distinguishes the personal and the conceptual, and also shows (a) how they may come to be enmeshed together, and (b) how, nevertheless, this calls for a different kind of work. Thus:

> Notwithstanding the illusion by which we want to be duped . . . we exist alone. Man is the creature who cannot escape himself, who knows other people only in himself, and when he asserts the contrary, he is lying. . . . We think we know . . . what people think for the simple reason that this doesn't matter to us. But the

> moment we burn with the desire to know, like the jealous man dies, then it is a dizzying kaleidoscope where we no longer distinguish anything.[5]

And:

> I knew [he says] that I should never possess the young cyclist if I did not possess also what was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire, a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be fulfilled.[6]

The first of these quotations raises a question of philosophical scepticism, while the second is an expression of personal despair. In connection with the second Dilman quotes Khalil Gibran:

> Aye, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God.
> But let there be spaces in your togetherness.
> And let the winds of heaven dance between you.[7]

But this, he says, for some people is the most difficult thing on earth, as it was for Marcel in Proust's work. In his book *Love and Human Separateness,* Dilman writes that it is only when one cannot accept the other person's separateness that this turns into something that separates:

> Much has to come together, if all Marcel is depicted in the novel as seeking in vain is to be found. To that extent Proust's pessimism is justified and comes from a deep knowledge of mankind. On the other hand, to see the possibilities which his philosophical reflections led him to rule out, one needs to return to and struggle with his philosophical problems. But to discover and realize these possibilities in one's own life is, of course, another matter. And one question is: to what extent is it possible to win through to any philosophical insight here without the kind of personal struggle that calls one's own life into question?[8]

Thus Dilman concludes:

> We see that philosophical problems and personal difficulties can come together and intermingle, as they did for Proust. (Thus philosophy in literature.) It is not surprising, therefore, to find in his novel depictions of the vicissitudes of the human heart and also philosophical reflections on human existence arising from these depictions. I hope I have been able to convey a sense of the way Marcel's personal problems, depicted in the novel with real psychological insight, turn into Proust's philosophical problems. We have seen that where this is so, to win through to philosophical insight one needs to come to terms with one's personal difficulties. But this does not mean that one's personal struggle will of itself

> yield philosophical insight. Such a struggle may be necessary, but it is no substitute for philosophical work. That is something that stands on its own feet.[9]

In the same volume, in chapter 10, entitled ‘Dostoyevsky: Psychology and the Novelist’, Dilman is interested in the same kind of mix, namely, the way *Crime and Punishment* raises and studies at once philosophical, psychological and ethico-spiritual questions. But the main point I wish to make is to indicate how Dilman starts from a study of Wittgenstein and a discussion of orthodox philosophical questions and then broadens his horizons in turning to questions such as novelists raise. He sees that such questions, pursued the way literature pursues them, yield much light. He discusses them as a philosopher, in very much the same way as he discusses the more orthodox philosophical questions he addresses in his book.

In his book on *Free Will* he considers the views of the great thinkers, some philosophers, some not, some determinists and some arguing for human freedom. He argues that while freedom is an integral part of human existence, bondage or determinism is also a serious reality for human beings. This does not mean, however, either that we are free or that our actions, thoughts, etc. are determined. This varies from case to case. But all that is true is that

> . . . as flesh-and-blood beings we are part of the material world and are subject to causality; as social beings we live in a world shaped by the culture to which we belong. We owe our very modes of thinking and assessment to it. We share its form of life and activities with others who exist independently of us and who co-operate as well as oppose us. We have a history, a past and roots in the past, attachments and loyalties. And, last but not least, chance too has a part in the events that confront us in our life and often stand in our way. We do not act in a vacuum and so we cannot be free in a vacuum. Each of us has to find his freedom, in the sense of autonomy, in a world of cause, chance and necessity.[10]

Among the thinkers he considers, Dilman seems to be most in sympathy with Spinoza and Simone Weil. The chapter on Spinoza is called ‘Human Freedom in a World of Strict Determinism’ and the one on Simone Weil ‘Freedom Within the Confines of Necessity’. He presents Spinoza’s thinking in everyday words totally purified of the language of his metaphysics. He shows how Sartre and Spinoza, though they stand on opposite sides of the free-will versus determinism divide, share a great deal of insight:

> At one extreme are those like Sartre who see human beings as inevitably free, even when they are in chains or living under an oppressive regime. For they take freedom to be a distinguishing mark of human existence. . . . At the opposite extreme are those like Spinoza and Simone Weil who are impressed by how much human beings are part of the causal order that constitutes nature. Through their physiological make-up human beings are subject to the causal laws which operate in the physical world. As flesh-and-blood beings they are part of the natural world to which animals belong, subject to hunger, thirst, sex and pain which, in certain circumstances can exercise intolerable pressures on them. Thirdly, as part of the *human* world they are subject to ego-centric emotions, such as greed or envy, and individual cravings, such as the thirst for revenge when thwarted, hurt or humiliated, and the desire to acquire and exercise power. . . . Even among the more civilized, self-interest is a motive which can easily go into active mode when tempted by opportunity. Here . . . Simone Weil speaks of 'the laws of moral gravity' which rule in the human soul. . . . Spinoza does not believe that there are any exceptions to such determinism or 'rule of necessity' as Simone Weil calls it. Does that mean that human beings are not free, full stop? In one sense Yes: we are a small part of a larger whole, subject to the movements that go through it, and we have no control over them. But there is a sense in which freedom is still possible for us. So how can we be free in a deterministic world, in the face of the kind of necessity which characterizes it? Spinoza's answer is again similar to Simone Weil's, so I shall put them side by side.[11]

In the Preface to his *Induction and Deduction* Dilman says that it is a central contention of the book that the questions raised by philosophical scepticism are at the core of philosophy and that to come to terms with them is to further the kind of understanding that one seeks in philosophy. He then links the two parts of the book in the next page:

> Can our belief in the uniformity of nature be justified? What makes it possible for us to suppose that nature may not be uniform or that there may be uncaused events? Are the laws of logic and the rules of grammar arbitrary? In what sense do they express necessary truths? These two sets of questions mirror each other and my discussions of them, around which the whole book gravitates, complement each other.[12]

In chapter 4, entitled 'Induction and the Uniformity of Nature', Dilman examines Hume's claim that the conformity between the future and the past is a matter of fact and cannot be proved without circularity. Yet, it is presupposed in all inductive inferences. In response to Hume, Dilman writes:

> Hume's supposition, the uniformity of nature, cannot be proved, and yet the scientist's faith in it seems unshakeable – he will not admit any instance to be so described as to constitute an 'interesting' exception to the uniformity of nature. But this is not a piece of dogmatism. It has to do with the kind of approach to natural phenomena that is at the heart of scientific investigation.[13]

He goes on:

> I have argued that language is the source of the system [or order] that we find in nature, and that the uniformity or haphazardness we find in physical occurrences is relative to the language we use.[14]

And further down:

> I have not argued that there are no uniformities of nature, but that what uniformities we perceive, detect and make use of in our predictions and explanations are relative to our language and systems of classification. . . . But to say that there are uniformities in nature is not to say that nature is uniform. For if there are uniformities there are also non-uniformities.[15]

Thus to speak of a uniformity – e.g., that salt dissolves in water – is to make a factual claim; but to claim that nature is uniform is *not* to make a very general factual claim as Hume thought. This is the kind of point Dilman develops in his later book, *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution*, in bringing out what is wrong with metaphysical or linguistic realism. I quote from the Introduction:

> We have a great variety of contexts in which we informatively assert or deny the reality of the variety of things to which we refer *in our use of language*. Given our philosophical interest, however, we can talk of 'dimensions of reality' as I have done – dimensions of reality which characterize the world in which we live, indeed the world of the life of our language. . . . Here philosophers have talked of 'reality' and have to distinguish what is in question from the sense of 'reality' contrasted with its opposites *in the use of language.* They have, for instance, talked of physical reality and the existence of physical objects and confused it with the reality of the water as an oasis appears in the distance during one's journey through a desert. They have shown no recognition that 'the reality of physical objects' as such is not something we can or do talk about, but rather something we take for granted in the use of language – such as when we say that there really is water in the distance. What we take for granted here . . . belongs to the language we use in stating such a fact. We learn it in learning to name, identify, and refer to various physical objects, to distinguish

> between situations in which we say that what we see is really there or is real and situations in which we deny this.[16]

Dilman suggests, that is, that Hume's uniformity of nature is on the same logical footing as the reality of physical objects or the physical world.

Dilman discusses the questions he raised in his early book *Induction and Deduction* in several chapters of his book *Language and Reality* as well. He discusses, for instance, Kripke's comparison of Wittgenstein with Hume. In the earlier book he had contrasted Hume with Wittgenstein. In the later book he considers Kripke's comparison of Wittgenstein's thought with Hume's sceptical solutions to his doubts about induction ('All inferences of experience are effects of custom'), and to his doubts concerning the existence of physical objects (it is in vain to try to prove their existence; even if we can ask what causes induce us to believe in their existence we shall find that it is 'imagination' that does so), Dilman writes that 'with a flip of the coin Hume's doubts can be given a new aspect under which their scepticism dissolves'.[17]

Thus, for instance:

> . . . belief in 'the continued and independent existence of bodies' which Hume regarded as the product of 'imagination' can be seen as an 'attitude' (Wittgenstein) manifested in those of our natural, matter-of-course reactions which constitute our adherence to a particular grammar, that of a physical reality. Thus when Wittgenstein remarks that our eyes are shut in the face of certain sceptical doubts about the existence of a particular material object in normal circumstances (see *Philosophical Investigations,* 224), what he is referring to is an instance of what he could have called 'an attitude towards a physical reality' (Compare with 'an attitude towards a soul', *Philosophical Investigations* II, p. 178.) [18]

Dilman points out that what Hume calls 'effects of custom' can also with a flip of the coin be given a new aspect under which they are seen as part of an 'attitude' towards the future in the light of the past. With such a flip of the coin Hume's admission of the failure of reason would be removed and so his 'sceptical solution' would no longer be a sceptical one. As Dilman puts it: Combat Hume's assumption that his solution is a sceptical one because it involves the admission of a failure of reason 'and Hume would be only a stone's throw away from appreciating what Wittgenstein calls '"the groundlessness of believing" (*On Certainty*, 166).'[19] However, Kripke is far from appreciating this. His comparison goes the other way: Wittgenstein, like Hume, is offering a 'sceptical solution' regarding the question of whether rules can determine a practice. Having mentioned Kripke, let me point out that two among Dilman's last books on Wittgenstein, apart from containing a discussion of Wittgenstein and the problem of metaphysical realism, also contain discussions of a number of recent philosophers who have written on Wittgenstein – Wisdom, Kripke, Strawson, Bambrough, Quine, Bernard Williams, G. E. M. Anscombe, Cora Diamond, and Hilary Putnam.

It was said earlier that in his book *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution* Dilman rejects linguistic or metaphysical realism, but without embracing linguistic idealism. He also discusses Wittgenstein's respective position. But what is linguistic realism? This is how Dilman articulates it in the introduction to the book:

> We are inclined to think: 'It is because the past is real that we have a past tense speech and so can talk about and refer to things and events in the past. It is because there is a physical reality in the form of objects that have a continued existence independent of whether or not we perceive them that we can speak of trees and rivers, rocks and mountains. It is because there is a great deal of recurrence and repetition in the world around us, objective similarities and differences between the things that we perceive, that we are able to classify things, to name them, to form concepts at all. It is because nature is uniform that we are able to predict, to reason inductively.
>
> This way of thinking is the source of the philosophical thesis known as Realism – 'linguistic realism' since it is a realism about the nature of language, about the possibility of speech and thought, of judgement and understanding. Realism thus sees itself naturally as a dam which holds back the waves of scepticism at the deepest conceptual level. It is at this level, I argue, that language and reality touch each other, make contact. But how? That is the question. Do they do so in the way that the realist thinks they do?[20]

This is the question the book investigates. I shall quote two paragraphs from the Introduction which give the gist of the answer the book argues for:

> For Wittgenstein language is inherently object-directed, to use a Kantian expression, in some ways as for Kant experience is inherently object-oriented. Thus in acquiring language we acquire the objects to which it is directed. The distinction between what is real and what is not which we make in different

> contexts and situations of our life, a life we live with language, presupposes the reality of the objects to which language is directed. Their reality is thus taken for granted in our use of language and in those situations of our life where the question arises for us whether a particular object presented to us in perception is red or not. That latter question is a question *within* our language and is settled by the appropriate kind of investigation. But the answer we come up with, I mean its truth, is *independent* of our language. The fact, for instance, that there usually is water where it seems to shimmer is *independent* of what I say or think.
>
> The objects of the formal concepts of our language, however, to continue in the Kantian idiom, the reality of the physical world for instance, are not subject to any kind of investigation. Here there is no distinction between concept and object. To possess the concept, the formal concept, that is to be master of the language, is to possess the object. In Wittgenstein's words: 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is' (PI, 373). For instance, it 'tells' us that a physical object has 'a continued and independent existence'. This is not anything we find out by any kind of investigation such as we carry out to find the properties and behaviour of an object, substance, or material – such as when we test a girder for its strength or try to find out whether some material is shrink-proof. For any such investigation would have to presuppose it, that is take place within a particular grammar. As I put it in the book, the formal concept or the grammar in which it is articulated gives the world which we acquire together with language a dimension of reality. Is this a form of 'linguistic idealism'? The book argues that it is not.[21]

II

I have surveyed the range of some of Dilman's books, letting the words I quote from them speak for themselves. I have done so to indicate the scope which philosophical questions had for him, the breadth of his interests, and the kind of connections he saw between them. I have thus tried to bring out the unity he found between the different areas of philosophy and where, for him, its center of gravity lay. I shall now turn to parts of his work that are exclusively concerned with human beings. I believe that these books came out of his eagerness to 'engage with something of significance in our lives' and to explore the linkage between 'philosophical difficulties and the problems of life'.

A long list of Dilman's books – *Freud and Human Nature*; *Freud and the Mind*; *Freud, Insight and Change*; the two studies on Plato (*Morality and the Inner Life: A Study in Plato's Gorgias* and *Philosophy and the*

Philosophic Life: A Study in Plato's Phaedo); the early book *Sense and Delusion*, which he co-authored with D.Z. Phillips; *Love and Human Separateness*; *Existentialist Critiques of Cartesianism*; *Love: Its Forms, Dimensions and Paradoxes*; *Free Will*; *Raskolnikov's Rebirth: Psychology and the Understanding of Good and Evil*; and the posthumous *The Self, the Soul and the Psychology of Good and Evil* – all constitute philosophical investigations of human beings and fundamental aspects of the human condition. The themes of the unconscious, psychoanalytic therapy, love, separateness and union, morality and the 'inner life', good and evil, values and the way human beings relate to them, the misconceptions of psychology as an 'empirical' or 'experimental science', behaviorism, human freedom, the vision of the philosophic life and its tribulations, all come within the scope of Dilman's philosophical engagements. More specifically, his engagement with these questions is articulated on two levels: either on the level of directly discussing human beings and human nature, or on that of exploring the philosophical presuppositions for a study and interpretation of them. In various places these two aspects of his research go hand in hand in a powerful way. A very good example of the latter seems to be *Raskolnikov's Rebirth*: in it Dilman explores both important aspects of the human psyche and behavior, and the conceptual confines within which psychology as a study of the soul finds its authentic sense and function.

A very central dimension of Dilman's work on human beings is the non-dualistic spirit with which it is infused: I do not simply mean the outright rejection of body/mind substance dualism and of its repercussions (exposed more systematically than anywhere else in the second part of the early *Matter and Mind*). Further, he consistently draws on another fundamental thesis of Wittgenstein: that the connection between the 'inner' and the 'outer' is not coincidental but criterial; so that there can be no conception of the 'inner' independently of the tangible life and action of human beings.

In *Morality and the Inner Life*, chapter 6, Dilman discusses the idea that there is a nature essential to man to which all morality and moral values stand in fundamental opposition. This is the view of Callicles (*Gorgias* 483), quoted by Dilman:

> Nature herself demonstrates that it is right that the better man should prevail over the worse and the stronger over the weaker.[22]

In other words, Callicles is the archetypal ‘might is right’ theorist. In discussing this view Dilman focuses on what he sees as a strong claim implicit in it: namely, that there is a morality read off from human nature itself, opposed to the common conventional morality that is tailored to the needs of the weak. Dilman disagrees with this claim and thinks that a logical fallacy is endemic in any attempt to build such a morality. This logical fallacy is one that Wittgenstein had struggled against throughout his philosophical work: it is the idea that human nature and essence, along with whatever belongs to them, can be conceptually separated from actual life and the environment of human action and expression. Moreover, it involves the assumption that actual life and instances of morality to be found there are merely an outpouring of the essential nature, a kind of symptom of what is lying behind. In its turn, human nature is considered as a kind of essence which functions as an explanatory hypothesis of human action (moral action included). The connection then between human nature and moral action remains external and symptomatic; it falls short of the internal connections that characterise a logical tie. Dilman writes:

> . . . for good reasons as well as for bad ones, we are inclined to isolate something common to all human beings as such, something that is operative in them and to be reckoned with irrespective of the social surroundings and form of culture in which they develop and find their identity. We talk of this as *human nature.* We are further inclined to regard it as, in some sense, fundamental, and to think of anything that opposes it as an imposition or interference. We thus make it into a measure of what is natural to man. In other words, we think that men are left to themselves and behave naturally only when their actions spring wholly from these common desires, which constitute human nature. Though in many ways they differed among themselves, Callicles and Nietzsche, Freud and D. H. Lawrence shared this inclination.[23]

So the natural morality that Callicles wants to promote fails to recognize that morality itself is not and cannot be given in nature, cannot be part of a raw unconceptualized reality. In this connection one can here recall Dilman’s parallel claim in *Wittgenstein’s Copernican Revolution*: language cannot come to describe raw data of an unconceptualized reality. Just like any other dimension of human life, morality also emerges within the context of social life. Dilman writes:

> [T]he social environment in interaction with which human beings grow and change is, as I said, man’s natural habitat, and morality of one form or another

> is part of this habitat. In this process of interaction and growth a man doesn't give up his individuality, sinking it in morality. He *finds* it there – unless, of course, he becomes a mere conformist.[24]

He continues:

> There are no limits to the forms of life, human activities and institutions that may develop among men. But there are limits to the kind of quality that finds expression in different forms of human activity and interaction. Lust, greed, envy and jealousy, vindictiveness and revenge; love, affection, generosity, and gratitude, forgiveness and atonement; anger, guilt, fear and depression; courage, devotion and self-sacrifice, cowardice and meanness – these constitute the *common humanity* that lies behind the diverse forms of life we find among men. This common humanity is inconceivable apart from the primitive or sophisticated cultures that have developed among men, though its seeds pre-date any such culture. [25]

Pre-linguistic responses out of which conceptual schemata develop, constitute a crucial aspect of the human condition, either in its more elementary or the most complex and sophisticated forms. But how do the seeds of 'common humanity' pre-date any such culture?

I suppose that Dilman's expression points to some very general characteristics of human beings, what Wittgenstein has seen as a part of our natural history. The possibility of pain or fear, for example, seems to be one of these seeds that do precede human culture. However, such a possibility only becomes a *conceptual* possibility within the stream of human life in a community, within culture.

To return to the idea of morality and the 'inner life': moral values emerge and take shape within the surroundings of tangible and outer life, in the course of human action and interaction. This is a logical point about the formation of any concept and not exclusive to moral value. Given this, however, what is the association between morality and 'inner life' that Dilman attempts to read off from the teachings of Socrates in the *Gorgias*? Dilman presents Socrates as a man whose values circumscribe an ideal 'inner life'. Suggesting that 'The form of a man's inner life is determined largely by the values in which he believes', he comments that in Socrates these values are 'other-worldly' or spiritual; but such other-worldliness does not signify a rejection of our essential and logically indispensable earthly life.[26]

What it does signify is a turn away from the world in which power, sensuality and success are exclusively desired and sought. They can then be seen as the upper limit of what Dilman describes as 'the kind of quality that finds expression in human activity and interaction'. They can only be shaped in human society and, in this sense, they are not suggested by nature. Nevertheless, they do not go against human nature for there cannot be an understanding of 'naked human nature' independent of the context where values can arise anyway. Thus they constitute the antipodes of Calliclean 'natural morality', but not through antagonizing human nature, as Callicles would think. What Dilman sees Socrates as standing in opposition to is not human nature but Callicles's projection of his own values onto nature. As Dilman puts it at the end of chapter 6:

> . . . while there may be something sound in the idea of a *human nature*, to make it into a measure of the difference between what is natural and what is artificial in the field of human action is to fall into confusion. Callicles' idea of what all men are really like, underneath, when left to themselves, is a normative conception. . . . [I]t is his conception of what is admirable that determines what he considers to be natural to man and not the other way around, as he pretends.[27]

What is interesting is that Callicles reaches such a normative conception and subsequent projection on the basis of an ultimately dualistic understanding. What such a brand of dualism fundamentally involves is the idea that essential human nature is only contingently related to society and culture. Dilman beautifully rejects such a dualism in his suggestion, already quoted, that a man finds his individuality in the social environment – 'unless, of course, he becomes a mere conformist'.[28]

Dilman's formulation captures the right balance between the logical requirement for a social context where morality can arise, and the moral imperative that man's values and action not be external to him. The 'externality' which reduces one to a mere conformist is not the same as the externality of the social environment that makes one a moral being. The former is a notion in ethics whereas the acknowledgement of the latter is – to use Wittgenstein's terminology – a grammatical remark.

Dilman explores another aspect of dualism in his second book on Plato, *Philosophy and the Philosophic Life: A Study in Plato's Phaedo.* This book too is a struggle with questions we have inherited from Plato. It is not an attempt at textual exegesis of a recognizably traditional style. The *Phaedo* is a dialogue concerning the soul and naturally it is this concept that Dilman places at the heart of his discussion concerning Platonic dualism. Central to the way he approaches the text is his highlighting the opposition between the life of the body or flesh and the life of the soul.

Dilman believes that Plato's masterpiece puts forward invaluable philosophical insight, which remains very powerful even for us today. On one condition: that it be liberated from what he sees as a metaphysical framework of assumptions, potentially distorting and misrepresenting its philosophical content. On page x of the Preface he writes:

> . . . there is some danger of taking Socrates' spiritual claims in the dialogue as metaphysical pronouncements. . . . While I do not deny that there is some metaphysics in the dialogue, I try to separate it from Socrates' spiritual and moral perceptions and give a non-metaphysical reading of the dialogue. The articulation of those perceptions does not need the aid or support of any metaphysics. Indeed, metaphysics, I believe, is simply a mystification of the grammar of the language in which such perceptions are expressed. The task of philosophy is the critical one of elucidating that grammar and demystifying our understanding of it.[29]

Dilman's primary concern is that the *Phaedo* be not read through modern post-Cartesian eyes. So he attempts to trace a different duality from the body/soul substance dualism we may be tempted to project upon the Platonic text. On the same page he gives expression to the following caveat:

> . . . I argue, for instance, that Socrates' dichotomy between body and soul has its life in the ethico-religious language to which he has contributed. It is quite distinct from the Cartesian dualism which has been so influential in philosophical debates about the nature of the mind: . . . the conceptual divorce between body and soul which characterizes Cartesian dualism is a response to certain questions which arise when 'language is like an engine idling' – as Wittgenstein put it. Consequently, the ideas of body and soul so divorced are both, as can be shown, at variance with our actual notions of body and soul and, furthermore, incoherent. This is not true of Socrates' notions of body and soul in the *Phaedo*. His dichotomy, as I try to show, is closely akin to the one between flesh and spirit to be found in the language of Christianity – a living religious language which engages with the life shared by those who are Christians.[30]

In stating that body-soul dualism is antithetical to *actual* notions of body and soul, Dilman expresses his refusal to discuss the 'soul' in a speculative way, independently of references to the kind of life beings with a soul live.

The soul is what a person comes to through self-renunciation, as Socrates argues in the *Phaedo*. Spiritual life or the life of the soul is a dimension of human life although many people live at a distance from it. To say that human beings have souls is therefore to say that such a life is a possibility within the human mode of existence.

It is not too difficult to see now that what Dilman calls 'the inner life' in his book on the *Gorgias* is precisely the kind of life in which a person finds his soul, while 'external life' is a life in which one is alienated from the soul. These are expressions that belong to a living language as opposed to the metaphysics of Cartesian dualism. We can find this kind of living language in Tolstoy's *Father Sergius*:

> From that time, with each month, week, and day that passed, Sergius felt his own inner life wasting away and being replaced by external life. It was as if he had been turned inside out. . . . [T]he more he gave himself up to such a life the more he felt that what was internal became external and that the fount of living water within him dried up, and that what he did now was done more and more for men and less and less for God.[31]

'More and more for men': in other words for human praise, and that means for the self, for oneself. 'Less and less for God': in other words less and less without thinking of oneself.

In the *Phaedo* Plato identifies the life of the soul with philosophic life. Here we should remember that 'philosophy' for Plato is the love of wisdom, where wisdom is the antithesis of the kind of knowledge possessed by those who are described as 'street-wise', that is those whose life is totally 'external' and shallow. Wittgenstein would have agreed that an external life in this sense is hardly conducive to philosophy, which takes a certain kind of sensibility for what is problematic. For him a person who sees no problems in life is blind to something important.[32]

It can also be claimed that the life of the soul is an ethical life in which an individual struggles to attain the perfect balance between the three parts of the soul (as presented in Book IV of the *Republic*). Dilman's analysis thus opens a way for further elaboration, even if this is not a line that Dilman pursues. I have in mind an appreciation of the parallel Plato makes in the *Republic* between the balance of the soul, and so its health and perfection, and that of the perfect society, the Platonic *politeia*. Dilman's book on the

Phaedo thus facilitates an understanding that the tripartite division of the soul in *Republic* IV is placed within a frame of discussion that never loses sight of the fact that the soul is to be found in embodied, engaged citizens who live and act in an equally non-aethereal environment, that of the Greek *polis.*

So, in detaching the soul from metaphysics and returning it to the living language of a religious ethics where what it means to talk about the soul is to be understood, Dilman makes an original contribution to Platonic scholarship. More than this, Dilman's book on the *Phaedo* explores what the life of the soul meant for Socrates, in a way that highlights such a life as meaningful for us today. Here it is relevant to quote the first short paragraph of his conclusion in *Language and Reality*:

> My main contention, in one sentence, has been that what a philosopher discovers in his work is not independent of what he gives to philosophy of himself. Hence 'working in philosophy . . . is really working on oneself' (*Culture and Value,* p. 16). It is both a working on one's own confusions and difficulties and also on one's personal relation to them. Certainly that is how it was for both Socrates and Wittgenstein. I argued that there is a close affinity in the way they saw philosophy.[33]

The notion of the immortality of the soul is very central in the *Phaedo*. There is an interesting discussion of this in Chapter 7 of Dilman's book on the *Phaedo* called the 'The Wheel of Time and the Immortality of the Soul', especially of what it means to have a glimpse of eternity in the course of one's life here on earth. Dilman finds an illustration of this in Eugene O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, where Edmund describes such an experience to his father. Here is part of the passage Dilman quotes:

> When I was on the Squarehead square rigger, bound for Buenos Aires. Full moon in the Trades. The old hooker driving fourteen knots. I lay on the bowsprit, facing astern, with the water foaming into spume under me. . . . I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm above me. I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself – actually lost my life. . . . I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray. . . . I belonged, without past and future, with peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of man, to Life itself! To God, if you want me to put it in that way.

Dilman writes:

> This is one vision of the eternal in which one inevitably participates – in this case through contact with ‘absolute beauty’ or ‘the form of beauty’ as Socrates would put it. In the *Phaedo* the soul attains to a vision of the eternal through contact with ‘absolute or perfect justice’ or ‘the form of the good’. In thus participating in the *eternal* the soul itself becomes *immortal*.[34]

This is in the course of one’s life. But what of the soul after death? Dilman asks this question in a paper entitled ‘Body and Soul’ published in the journal *Philosophical Investigations*, in January 2002. He argues there that the soul’s existence after death and the disintegration of the body do not presuppose the possibility of ‘disembodied existence’. What is important to recognize, he writes, is that what it means to talk of the existence of the soul *after death* is to be found in the life of the living: it is *in the life of the living* that the service of the words in which we speak of the dead is to be found – their service in the context of those actions of ours directed to those now dead – those for instance we have loved and lost – such as praying for them, remembering them, grieving for them, celebrating their life now over, thinking of our own future death and reflecting on it in the light of those now dead, etc. Our relationship with the dead is not over now because they are dead. It continues, transformed in their permanent absence and silence, and in that transformation they are themselves transformed as objects of our transformed relationships. It is here, Dilman argues, that we shall find our conception of the dead – what they are to us, what they mean to us and so the sense of what we *say* about the dead, what our religions *say* about them, and what we can *learn* from those sayings. It is in this spirit that Dilman tries to make sense of the soul’s existence after death in his paper ‘Body and Soul’ as well as to consider objections.

Dilman’s concern with human beings and ethics is not exhausted with the philosophical achievements of his two books on Plato. Central to his concerns is the question of what makes a person true to herself, an authentic personality. Dilman denies that such questions can be studied by scientific psychology and this is a line of thought initially presented in his book *Mind, Brain and Behaviour: Discussions of B. F. Skinner and J. R. Searle* and fully developed in *Raskolnikov’s Rebirth: Psychology and the Understanding of Good and Evil*, and in his last book, entitled *The Self, the Soul, and the Psychology of Good and Evil.*

In this connection I should take notice of another important pattern manifesting itself in Dilman's works: the importance he attaches to great works of literature. The inspiration he draws from, among others, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Marcel Proust, is a recurring feature of his thought. He puts such inspiration to good use in his discussions of human beings. By way of example, one can mention his discussion of Marcel Proust in *Love and Human Separateness* or of Homer's *Iliad* and Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* in his book *Free Will: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction.* There is also an important discussion of moral authenticity in *Sense and Delusion*: this emerges against the background of Tolstoy's great novels.

In *Sense and Delusion* Dilman discusses the cases of Kitty Scherbatsky, a character from *Anna Karenina*, as well as of Father Sergius and of Ivan Ilych, characters from two of Tolstoy's stories. In so doing he explores two ways in which self-deception prevents people from being authentic to themselves: the first is double-mindedness, the second is egocentricity. In both cases, the person resists realizing the ethical and personal void in which he lives. As Dilman puts it: 'The man in question, whether he is Ivan Ilych or Alcibiades, is represented as resisting some realization which would be a change in him.'[35] Such change, if and when it comes, will have to involve a radical incommensurability, '*incommensurability* between the life that is condemned here as a lie, a life of deception, and the life from the perspective of which this judgement is made'.[36]

This kind of incommensurability is philosophically vital for Dilman. For a lot of what is important in moral philosophy or philosophy of psychology seems to be connected with it. It is vital, for example, to a philosophical appreciation of what emotional and moral growth and change are all about. Fundamental in Dilman's exploration of these issues is his focus on individual human cases as they appear in good literature. This is certainly connected with Wittgenstein's perennial advice to pay attention to particulars: from them one can learn about self-deception, moral learning, and authenticity of character. One can also learn and get help in trying to avoid the traps of a life characterized by alienation and meaninglessness. This kind of knowledge, however, cannot be anything like a map of such a journey towards greater truthfulness in life. It is not already there, ready to unfold before one's eyes. It gradually crystallizes out of a series of paths one may take and then turn back from, try and then regret, tread upon, again and again. These paths cannot form any kind of structured, general, and repeat-able route: they are unique to the person who travels them, but their narrative may be of help to others who agonize through similar journeys.

The latter point becomes stronger and more explicit in *Raskolnikov's Rebirth: Psychology and the Understanding of Good and Evil.* In it, as in his earlier book on Skinner, Dilman castigates what he, following Wittgenstein, considers to be pretensions of psychology as an experimental, empirical science. In the last part of the book he presents Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky's hero in *Crime and Punishment.* This discussion is a test case of reconstructing a literary narrative philosophically: Dilman presents it as a story of radical change in Raskolnikov's mode of being and moral perspective. It thus becomes a conceptual investigation into the ways in which Raskolnikov's relation to good and evil gradually changes. In such a philosophical reconstruction we find an account of what one's relation to good and evil, and a shift in this relation *may conceivably be.* In other words, it purports to highlight what are the conceptual confines within which such relations may arise and express themselves. Here, there cannot be a general account or theory covering all possible cases in human life. For Dilman, any search for laws governing the human psyche with universal application constitutes a conceptual misunderstanding of psychological phenomena and, so, a violation in the logic of psychological research. He claims:

> The [experimental] psychologist . . . misconceives the nature or character of his thinking; he thinks of it as offering conclusions that are subject to empirical confirmation – as in physics. Consequently, as Wittgenstein put it so eloquently: 'The existence of the experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and method pass one another by' (*Philosophical Investigations, ,* II, p.232).[37]

According to Dilman, experimental psychology manifests itself in two ways: either in the conception of an introspective psychology like the one William James promoted, or as the kind of grotesque caricature that Skinner puts forward in his utopia *Walden Two.* Dilman quotes James as saying that 'when psychology is treated as a natural science ''states of mind'' are taken for granted as data immediately given in experience' and then remarks: 'It is such data that the subject is supposed to report to the psychologist, the experimenter.'[38]

Neither such experimentation with data, nor Skinner's 'behavioral engineering' and 'operant conditioning', however, can furnish the kind of knowledge one would expect to find in psychology in its original sense as a study of the human psyche and so of human beings. Dilman comments on Wittgenstein's view that what one acquires through the latter is better judgement concerning individual people and their behavior. So the generality psychology can aspire to

> lies in the way one who comes to it comes to a new perspective on life. . . . [I]t is as such that it enters my dealings with and responses to people in particular situations and my judgements about their conduct.[39]

This last quotation epitomizes Dilman's thought and philosophy in ways that stretch beyond the scope of its particular context. For it shows that, especially in studying human beings and their lives, paying attention to our dealings with other people and to our responses to them is of paramount importance. Dilman highlights the surroundings of human interaction as the conceptual framework where some of the most important philosophical questions can be meaningfully asked and answered. It is in such surroundings that perspectives on life can be formed: perspectives on morality, on the 'soul', and as we see now, on psychology. Failure to acknowledge and account for the reality of other human beings amounts to solipsism, not only in its classical Cartesian sense, but also in what Dilman sees as its Sartrean version.

Dilman discusses the latter in his book *Existentialist Critiques of Cartesianism,* where he describes Sartre's position as 'affective' solipsism but also as 'ontological'. He writes:

> Thus having successfully rejected Cartesian solipsism Sartre falls into a different kind of philosophical solipsism, which may be characterized as 'ontological solipsism' because it has its source in a feature of human existence as Sartre conceives of it.[40]

Sartre's ontological solipsism consists mainly in the assumption that communion between individuals is impossible. Given what human existence essentially is, and given that our autonomy can only be achieved in our separating ourselves from others, human beings are 'radically or irremediably alone'. There is no possibility for communion in love or friendship.[41]

As Dilman sees it, what Sartre fails to recognize is that, as a conceptual possibility, our autonomy is grounded in our acknowledgement of and communion with others. This failure parallels Descartes' failure to recognize that the existence of the world is the ground of the possibility of doubting it.

This brings one back to Dilman's emphasis on the required human context where our concepts, language, questions and answers are embedded. Specifically, the human beings that Dilman had the ambition to study at the beginning of his philosophical life are placed at the most central position in his philosophical thought, not simply as subject-matters of investigation, but also as the beings whose life and action define the logical space where any philosophical investigation is meaningful. Dilman's work is a struggle against the abstract language of metaphysics, divorced from particular contexts of life in which language makes sense. Cartesian dualism and its satellites stand in the way of a non-metaphysical understanding of the mind, soul and morality. Another example is scientism: it infects contemporary psychology and casts its shadow on the value of some of Freud's most fundamental achievements.

Dilman's posthumous work bearing the characteristic title *The Self, the Soul, and the Psychology of Good and Evil*, revisits and brings together several themes expounded in his previous books. In this book on moral theory, Dilman reiterates his criticism of 'scientifically orientated experimental psychology' which he contrasts to a 'thoughtful psychology'.[42] Just like in *Raskolnikov's Rebirth,* Dilman is once again concerned with problems of human life. More specifically, his perspective consists in 'understanding human beings in their individual existence and not as units or samples whose conduct is subject to general laws'. So he sets out to explore the connection between psychology and the individual's morality, focusing on the relations between moral issues and problems with the development of a person's character and sense of the self.

The notions of good and evil come to the foreground as Dilman links them conceptually with what he calls 'enabling' and 'determining' psychology, respectively. His intended connection of evil with 'determining psychology', by contrast to that of the good with an 'enabling' one, is part of a broader attempt to introduce and give an account of a 'morality of love'.

Dilman emphatically claims that the mark of goodness is love:

> . . . goodness is the expression of a selfless love in its many forms. One could also put it the other way round, namely that pure love in its many forms is an expression of goodness.[43]

Adopting a standpoint of love in one's relations with others is an ongoing and demanding process, involving, among other things, forgiveness, tolerance and generosity. On Dilman's analysis, such a process empowers a person to reach a sense of his or her behavior *as his or her own*, and in doing so, to achieve an authentic awareness of the self. The absence of love and of the attitudes it entails, on the other hand, casts a shadow on a person's ability to take responsibility for his or her own action. For, as Dilman sees it, evil is not symmetrical to the good: hatred, greed, or meanness, are forces which fragment the moral agent, lead it astray, and so impair a positive realization of the self. In this sense, evil is a source of alienated action in which the person is dragged by negative inclinations which *determine* his behavior. Fed by evil, determining psychology is the psychology of a person whose actions are not really his or her own and have to be interpreted by reference to forces external to the self. Here Plato's influence on Dilman is unmistakeable. At the same time his analysis is the springboard for a sustained critique of psychologism, especially of Freud's psychoanalytic reductionism.

Dilman rightly considers Freud's insistence that every dimension of human behavior can be given an explanation to be reductionist. According to Freud a person's agency can be ultimately reduced to some psychological mechanism which exists outside his or her conscious control. In this way Freud's theory excludes the possibility of genuine goodness in human life. Dilman's suggested asymmetry between good and evil is at work at this juncture as well: according to him evil can be given a psychological explanation for, after all, evil is a source of hindrances which prevent a person from being a genuine moral agent. However, if goodness is interpreted in Freud's manner, as a mere epiphenomenon of unconscious psychological dynamics, it loses its very character as an expression of what is morally genuine in man. He writes:

> To claim that *all* moral behaviour has such psychological explanations, as Freud seems to have done, is to suggest that moral behaviour is never what it appears to be: never genuine, always corrupt.[44]

Dilman tries to go beyond the impasse of psychologism by deepening his insight concerning a morality of love. Just like in his previous books, he often uses characters from great novels as examples that help him illustrate his points. He highlights love as a force which enables the person to open up to others, to cease being defensive and to grow in maturity. As he sees it, love makes a person capable of 'owning' his or her psychological strengths rather than being causally determined by psychological powers.

Dilman's account is a very welcome development: it successfully challenges a deeply entrenched moral reductionism which is widely popular among contemporary psychologists, moral theorists, and popular culture, alike. In so doing, it takes us beyond the picture of human beings as incapable of making genuine moral choices and taking full responsibility for them. Moreover, his discussion of these issues, not by recourse to clinical methods, but grounded on a reflective basis such as one sees in literature, prevents naive categorizations of human action and of good and evil. İlham Dilman's swan song, just like his beginning in philosophy, is again set to unearth 'what is significant in our lives'. His account of the good as an irreducible reality of human life, along with his exploration of the philosophical difficulties involved in understanding its significance, brings Dilman's philosophical production to a close in a most telling way.

NOTES

[1] İlham Dilman was born in Istanbul in 1930. He studied in Robert College, an American College overlooking the Bosphorous. He graduated with a B.Sc. (1950) and went to Cambridge where he studied philosophy – the Moral Science tripos – and then worked for a Ph.D. under the supervision of John Wisdom. His thesis was entitled *A Philosophical Investigation into Psycho-Analysis*. He obtained his Ph.D. in 1959 and returned to Turkey to do his military service for 18 months, after which he went to Swansea where he was offered a tutorship for the year (1961). The next year he became a lecturer and his philosophical career took off from there. In University College, Swansea, as it was called then, he found a philosophically congenial atmosphere and colleagues who became his friends. He went to teach in America after six years, but returned to Swansea where eventually he was given a personal chair (1984) and later a Research Professorship (1994). He retired in 1997, but kept a room at the University and continued to work and take part in post-graduate seminars for a long time afterwards. He died in Istanbul in 2003.

[2] *Philosophical Investigations,* Vol. 24, No. 2, April 2001, p. 116.
[3] Ibid., pp. 119-120.
[4] Ibid., p. 117.
[5] Quoted in *Proust: Human Separateness and the Longing for Union*. Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the College on May 6, 1986, University College of Swansea, 1986, p. 17.
[6] Quoted in *Proust: Human Separateness and the Longing for Union*, p. 15.
[7] Quoted in *Proust: Human Separateness and the Longing for Union*, p. 21.
[8] *Love and Human Separateness* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 106-107.
[9] Ibid., p. 108.
[10] *Free Will: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London, 1999), p. 7.
[11] Ibid., pp. 127-129.
[12] *Induction and Deduction: A Study in Wittgenstein* (Oxford, 1973), p. v.
[13] Ibid., p. 55.
[14] Ibid., p. 57.
[15] Ibid., p. 63.
[16] *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution: The Question of Linguistic Idealism* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 5-6.
[17] *Language and Reality: Modern Perspectives on Wittgenstein* (Belgium, 1998), p. 56.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution: The Question of Linguistic Idealism*, p. 2.
[21] Ibid., pp. 9-10.
[22] *Morality and the Inner Life: A Study in Plato's Gorgias* (London, 1979), p. 84.
[23] Ibid., p. 91.
[24] *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution: The Question of Linguistic Idealism,* p. 96.
[25] Ibid, p. 97. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Oxford, 1967), edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M Anscombe, paragraphs 540-541.
[26] *Morality and the Inner Life, A Study in Plato's Gorgias*, p. vii.
[27] Ibid., p. 104.
[28] Ibid., p. 96.
[29] *Philosophy and the Philosophic Life: A Study in Plato's Phaedo* (London, 1992), p. x.
[30] Ibid., pp. x-xi.
[31] Quoted by Dilman, ibid., pp. 84-85.
[32] For a discussion of this see Chapter 11 in *Language and Reality: Modern Perspectives on Wittgenstein.*
[33] *Language and Reality: Modern Perspectives on Wittgenstein*, p. 226.
[34] *Philosophy and the Philosophic Life: A Study in Plato's 'Phaedo'*, p. 127.
[35] İlham Dilman and D.Z. Phillips, *Sense and Delusion* (London, 1971), p. 82.
[36] Ibid, p. 86.
[37] *Raskolnikov's Rebirth: Psychology and the Understanding of Good and Evil* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 42-43.
[38] Ibid., p. 7.

[39] Ibid.
[40] *Existentialist Critiques of Cartesianism* (London, 1993), p. xi.
[41] See ibid., p. xi.
[42] *The Self, the Soul, and the Psychology of Good and Evil* (London, 2005), p. ix.
[43] Ibid., p. 144.
[44] Ibid., p. 85.

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Chapter 8

R. W. Beardsmore: Understanding Moral Judgement

JOHN H. WHITTAKER

If we distinguish between Wittgenstein's substantive moral views, expressed in his early *Lecture on Ethics*,[1] and his more discriminating grammatical approach to logical issues that we find in the later works, we can say that R. W. Beardsmore[2] tried to bring this latter way of doing philosophy to ethics. One might even say that he tried to give ethics something like a Wittgensteinian moral epistemology. That would be misleading if it were thought to imply anything like a *theoretical system* for making moral discoveries or resolving moral problems. But if epistemological work includes conceptual clarity about the distinctions that we commonly observe when we are making moral judgements – but which we often forget when we reflect analytically on what we are doing – then it can be said that Beardsmore brought some epistemological light to the dark subject of moral judgement.

Contrary to the aspirations of many, Beardsmore tried to show that there is no such thing as an *ultimate, rational* ground of moral justification in ethics. Not that there are no arguments, but our arguments always rest on deep, often unspoken, moral commitments. These commitments involve our conceptions of value, and the place that they occupy in our thinking does not rest on evidentiary grounds. Thus, there are limits of sense to which the effort to justify our moral values can be taken; and the hope of finding some absolutely secure ground for moral judgement, something that transcends these values, lies beyond these limits. To see *why* such a ground does not exist is to see our moral judgements more clearly for what they are.

Accordingly, this 'groundlessness' does not in itself uncover a weakness in our thinking, as if it meant that *a ground were missing where one is required.* The requirement of an absolute ground secured by value-neutral and transcendent criteria has literally no sense in relation to ethics, and to construct such a value-neutral ground does nothing to secure the reasonableness of our fundamental moral commitments. We can and do make absolute ethical judgements *in one sense*, simply because the reasons that we give for our moral views eventually come to an end in evaluative judgements on which we stand. Yet this end is not something that lies outside of evaluative thinking. It is a *moral* ground. And when we try to defend this ground in a way that objectively proves its absolute character, we simply reaffirm our most basic moral convictions.

I think that Beardsmore is right about the logically primitive or underived nature of our moral intuitions. And I think that this view is less objectionable than it might appear; for in developing these views, he does not endorse an easy relativism. Strange as it might sound, we can still say of our most fundamental judgements in ethics that they are both groundless and true. One might even say that they state 'facts', and that these facts make up the moral reality of our lives. Beardsmore himself did not speak in these ways; but such language is not out of place, and it tells us something about the antipathy between his views and moral relativism.

Much of what Beardsmore has to say on this score reflects conversations with his colleagues, particularly Peter Winch, D. Z. Phillips, and the colleague who influenced all of them, Rush Rhees. It also reflects, though less obviously, Wittgenstein's notes *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein says nothing about ethical certainties in *On Certainty*, and Beardsmore seldom refers to this source in discussing ethics. Yet he does refer to these notes in an essay on censorship in works of art.[3] There his point is that censorship depends on the presumed view that some people, namely the censors, are in a better position to judge a work of art than we are, and that *this* idea – that there are experts better able to judge works of art than we ourselves – is incoherent. Because the judgement of beauty is not grounded in the kind of knowledge that is accessible only to the learned, there are no experts whose knowledge of the history of art makes them better able to see beauty than those who lack such a learned background. Personal judgement rather than expertise is what matters. Beauty discloses itself to the self-involving engagement with artwork, not to the self-absenting deferral of judgement that belongs to ordinary cognition. And the same is true of moral judgements.

Experts, after all, cannot make our judgements *for us*, either in appraising the value of art or the moral value of our lives. We must make these decisions for ourselves. One might think that this fact alone might preclude ethical judgements from ever being certain in the sense in which non-evaluative factual claims can be certain. There is too much disagreement for that, as we simply take our personal stands on different moral grounds. Yet there is another connection between the spirit of Wittgenstein's remarks and nature of ethical sureness; and this connection, along with the Beardsmore's remarks on groundlessness of basic moral convictions, is what I would like to chase down.

Moral Obligation and Moral Possibilities

Perhaps we should start further back, beginning with an example of the kind of absolute ground for moral judgement that Beardsmore denies. In 'Atheism and Morality,'[4] he challenges the commonplace idea that there is a crucial link between the moral life and the belief in God. G. E. M. Anscombe had argued that the concept of a specifically *moral duty* is a holdover from an earlier time in which the notion of such obligation belonged to a theistic conception of an all-powerful God. Presumably, this conception of God entailed the notion of there being absolute sanctions, matters of eternal life and death, attached to his commandments, so that the concept of having a moral obligation to God depended on the sense of one's being utterly at the mercy of God. Thus, in an earlier age, theists, such as Jews, Stoics, and Christians, felt bound by moral law because they felt bound by the law's divine source, as they were no more able to escape the law's obligations than they were able to escape their interest in their own welfare. Today, however, people can quite easily escape theism in their views of the world, and so the concept of an absolute obligation no longer holds any real power. The sense of being divinely compelled by duty simply lingers as the needless afterglow of this earlier and once-religious way of thinking.[5]

This view, according to Beardsmore, vastly oversimplifies the possible relations between moral obligation and the belief in God.[6] For one thing, Anscombe was undoubtedly being tendentious when she described the divine command theory as if it were completely outmoded, since this theory, or something very much like it, might well capture the thinking of many believers. Yet even if we agree that these believers hold outmoded and theologically primitive views, we can still trace other connections between religion and moral obligation; and we can do so without assuming that the concept of God functions as a power that frightens people into submission. More importantly, however, we can account for the sense of moral duty without presuming any connection to religion at all.

To take Beardsmore's example, people might feel that their identities as a trade unionist or a doctor impose certain obligations; and for this reason they might feel that they have no alternative other than to obey a picket line or to answer an emergency call. Such people might well treat such obligations as personal absolutes, if you will, since other possible courses of action are – *for them* – ruled out as moral possibilities. The trade unionist just *couldn't* cross a picket line, and the doctor just *couldn't* refuse an emergency call, and this might have nothing to do with the belief that these duties are imposed by God. The repugnance at the idea of crossing a picket line or refusing help comes from the way that committed unionists and committed doctors understand themselves. One might ask, of course, why there should be any such morally impossible actions for the unionist or the doctor since either could simply give up his profession. But Beardsmore points out that this objection could be as easily raised against those who feel absolutely obligated to do the will of God. Nothing compels a person to remain a believer anymore than anything compels a person to remain a unionist or a physician. The binding character of obligation that is often envisioned as a part of theism is no less dependent on remaining a believer than a doctor's sense of her medical obligations is dependent on her remaining a doctor. If there is anything to this objection, therefore, it cuts as strongly against the attempt to derive binding obligation from the idea of God as it does against the attempt to speak of binding obligations as being ingredient in a person's self-understanding.

Admittedly, it might be easier to imagine losing one's status as a trade unionist than losing one's identity as a believer. Being a trade unionist, after all, is dependent on certain forms of socio-economic organization, while being a believer is much less dependent on social and economic forms of organization. But Beardsmore's argument does not depend on the idea that the sources of moral obligation must be immune to change to be binding. For believers, once again, can cease to understand themselves in religious terms. Their faith can be crushed by the weight of personal tragedies, believers can wilt under the pressure of argumentative challenges to their belief systems, or they can simply grow into being different persons, no longer comfortable with themselves *as* believers. Once something like this happens, some things that were morally impossible for them can become not only possible but tempting. Beardsmore does not deny this. He simply says that some forms of behavior are simply ruled out as possible options *while one remains the person he understands himself to be.*

Why is this? In Beardsmore's examples I think that we are to imagine people who identify themselves strongly with certain social or professional roles; and if this self-identification is strong enough, it carries with it limitations in behaviors that are consistent or inconsistent with their sense of who they are. Thus, people often say, 'I just couldn't do that,' when in fact it is perfectly imaginable *for us* to think of them doing that very thing. Yet *they* cannot think of themselves as performing the act in question because their sense of who they are is bound up with a certain form of self-understanding, a form in which their sense of selfhood resides. 'If I were to allow myself to do *that*, I would no longer be *me*! I would have to be a person that I am not.' That is why they cannot do the act in question. It is not so much a question of the act itself, much less of its physical or psychological possibility; the constraint comes from the fact that one cannot recognize himself or herself *in the imagined activity*. 'I can imagine others doing such a thing; but I cannot imagine *myself* behaving in such a fashion.' To do the morally impossible thing they would have to be untrue to themselves, dissolving a morally deep-running sense of who they are. The sense of being *bound* by some inviolable duties, then, is inextricably connected with the formation of this kind of moral selfhood. The way in which such an identity becomes bound up with moral considerations is characteristic of the most fundamental sort of moral commitment. It explains why some behaviors are morally unthinkable for people, given the way they have their identity bound up with moral self-conceptions.

The situation is no different with religious believers and their sense of obligation. To be a sincere believer, one must find one's sense of identity in a religious self-understanding; and the sense of inner integrity that results from this makes certain behaviors morally unthinkable. Such a religious form of understanding, no less than one's moral self-understanding, might be less vulnerable to change than one's occupational role; but this does not affect the logic of the matter. None of the ways in which we acquire our deepest sense of identity by investing ourselves in the principles by which we live proves invulnerable to the possibility of change, but none of them *needs* to be. The relevant sense of being limited in what one can imagine oneself doing depends on the extent of one's self-identification while it lasts; for while it lasts it carries with it the character of inviolable obligation.

Beardsmore does not go deeply into this business of self-identification, but he provides a further example. He says that he would not even consider the possibility of killing his infant daughters or selling his children into slavery. He knows, of course, that some people in various times and places have done just that, and he also admits that he would be hard pressed to justify the moral revulsion he feels at such an act, as if his attitude were a *choice*.

> Perhaps my children are important to me, so that in a whole range of situations, I shall regard myself as facing obligations to protect them, help further their careers, help them out of financial difficulties. And perhaps there are societies in which female offspring are sometimes left to die, or where children are sometimes sold into slavery. But what of it? The fact that there are alternative ways of regarding one's children does nothing to show that these are alternatives for me or that I reached the values which I possess by selecting them from a range of alternatives.[7]

Here he might as well have simply said that he just *couldn't* sell his children into slavery or leave them out to die. He might simply say, 'My daughter is my *child*!', as if to underscore the horror of selling her. When people say such things, the necessity that constrains their action is not derived from a necessary *inference*, as if one had a logically compelling ground for selecting one and not another equally possible alternative. The necessity comes from the fact that all alternatives are *not* equally possible. Some are ruled out because they are unthinkable for us, given our evaluatively laden self-understanding as parents.

In this last case, the constraints of conscience have nothing to do with one's particular socio-economic identity, as one's social or occupational role matters little when it comes to caring for one's children. When one says, for example, "I just could not kill my children" (e.g., in response to the recent story in American news about a woman who did just that), one expresses a moral incapacity that is obviously not tied to one's job. For one can change one's identity in this socio-economic sense without having any effect on the moral unthinkableness of killing children. Killing children is *inhuman* precisely because it is *not* tied to particular social roles that we play, but is something that transcends the socially individuating ways that we forge an identity. Here our self-understanding is tied to general ethical values, and we simply cannot see how one could construe one's life in evaluative ways *unless* one recoiled in horror at the prospect of killing one's children.

For most of us, then, taking care of one's children has the characteristics of a moral absolute because no other alternatives are thinkable. Unlike those cases in which we are tempted to behave in ways that conflict with duty, there are no threatening or live alternatives here to do something else. Special reasons for taking care of one's children are therefore not required because they are not needed. The imagined ethical choices for which compelling criteria are required are obviated by the way in which ethical values help to form our identities and thus to constrain our choices. Before any of these could become anything more than empty, abstract possibilities, our self-concepts would have to be utterly transformed. We would have to come to new ways of thinking of ourselves, imagining new identities and new ways of being in the world. But without intelligible motives to make these imaginings tempting – motives that are not provided by the sheer fact that some people *have* sold their children into slavery – our commitment to the values that are wrapped up in our sense of ourselves will remain unchallenged.

This view of Beardsmore does not depend on an anthropological theory that anchors moral possibilities in a non-evaluative *biological* conception of what human beings are by nature. Obviously those who kill their children are human in this biological sense. They are not being humane, and our sense of what is humane and inhumane is anchored in a peculiarly *moral* sense. Virtually everything that we understand as moral criticism, conscientious reflection, struggling with moral issues, appreciating moral differences, and weighing our moral decisions involves this moral sense. It belongs to the way that we understand ourselves, not to our biology; and it includes some such limitations in what we find it morally possible to do. These limitations depend on acquiring a particular conscience, and not on non-moral grounds that are morally telling, nor on any other kind of logically prior ground that might make the correctness of our value system objectively determinable. Having an inwardly secure moral identity gives us a sense that amounts to what Wittgenstein might have described as ethical certainty, a sureness that forms an indispensable background for a sincerely moral life.[8]

Gratitude and Morality

For Beardsmore, then, the sense of moral obligation is or can be independent of justificatory grounds that lie outside of it; and this point applies as well to the relationship between morality and religion. Moral obligation need not be derived from a religious outlook. Other ways of forming an identity out of self-understanding are more than enough to explain the constraints we feel as moral agents. Before he leaves this subject, however, he wonders whether there might be another way in which a person's obligations might owe their existence to religion. Perhaps the sense of being morally bound comes, not from being enthralled by religious conceptions of an absolute power, but from the *gratitude* that believers feel for being absolutely and unconditionally sustained by God and his love. Those who experience such a sense of gratitude naturally express it in their words and behavior. This expression is not simply a psychological need but a logical one as well, since those who do not express their gratitude *in any way* can not be said to feel it in the first place. An 'inner process [e.g., gratitude],' as Wittgenstein said, '[always] stands [logically] in need of outward criteria.'[9] And the complete absence of any form of outward expression thus belies the claim that one is *in fact* grateful.

With this point in mind, we can illuminate one of the primary ethical injunctions of religion – that we treat our neighbors as ourselves. Those who accept this commandment can comply with it in two ways: either by trying to comply outwardly in their behavior, forcing themselves to check the various temptations to behave otherwise; or they can will their neighbor's good spontaneously, without having to override any negative impulses at all. Yet to be able to comply with the commandment in this second sense, they must have a heart that is naturally, without constraint, oriented to the good of the neighbor. Otherwise, they will have no choice but to struggle against themselves, fighting to overcome the self-regarding inclinations that come naturally to them. In other words, they will have to make an *effort* to remember the neighbor if they are to comply with the commandment at all. Yet that will leave them feeling hypocritical about themselves, as if their underlying motives were anything but loving. That seems to have been exactly Jesus's point when he criticized the scribes and Pharisees for 'cleaning only the outside of the cup and not the inside' (Mt. 23:25-26). The scribes and Pharisees had to force themselves to act in a loving manner, and as a result their behavior fell short of the ideal of spontaneity intended by the 'spirit' of the love commandment.

Yet all this might change if believers were moved by the welling-up of an internal sense of gratitude toward God. Then they might 'delight in the law', taking the requirement that one love one's neighbor as oneself as an opportunity to express thanksgiving. Think, for example, of those who feel incomparably blessed by a benefactor and who have no way of repaying this benefactor. Their sense of being blessed results in a spontaneous upsurge of good will; but as there is no possibility to repay the benefactor, the gratitude they feel often turns its expression toward others, and repaying the neighbor stands in place of repaying God. This in fact is the form that gratitude toward God takes: one repays God in passing love and good will on toward others. Here there is no constraint, no felt obligation before an externally imposed standard of behavior. Instead of being duty-bound by an externally imposed commandment, those who feel grateful to God willingly pass on to their neighbors the love that they feel themselves to have received. This, I think, is largely what it means to delight in the law of God, or to obey divine commandments in spirit and truth, according to their intent.

Rather than involving himself in the theological elaboration of these last points, however, Beardsmore attempts only to show that the same connection between gratitude and ethical motivation can be found in the life of the atheist just as easily as it can be found in the life of the believer. The issue for him is whether or not all forms of gratitude for one's good fortune implicitly presume that there is a God. Most of us think that if we are grateful for the gifts that good fortune bestows, we must be grateful *to someone*; and so if these gifts do not come from earthly benefactors, then they must come from some other-worldly source. Hence, it might sound counter-intuitive to think of atheists as being grateful for the good fortune that is not a deliberate present from other people. True gratitude in such cases must be possible *only* for those who can answer the question, 'To whom are you grateful?' by saying, 'I am grateful to God.'

But is this necessarily so? Surely non-believers often do feel grateful for their good fortune, even when they have no persons to thank. In addressing himself to this issue, Raimond Gaita acknowledges that atheists in such circumstances might be filled with a sense of gratitude, but then he says that they need not be religious 'in the strict sense'. They need not speak of God or invoke his name in prayer, for example. But they remain *implicitly* religious, meaning that they might silently or wordlessly express thanks to a divine source of love. Yet why make this proviso? Why, as Beardsmore asks, need we attribute *any* kind of divine recognition to atheists who feel grateful? After a mountain climbing accident that he was fortunate enough to survive, Hank Williams, Jr. felt thankful – he even offered thanks. Yet there was no one in particular to whom these thanks were addressed.[10]

Not everyone, after all, looks for personal beings to thank; they thank their 'lucky stars' or they thank 'heavens' or they thank 'goodness.' Sometimes they simply thank 'the day they were born.' These 'objects' of thanksgiving simply hold the place that the question, 'What do you thank?' seems to anticipate. *Something*, we feel like saying, must be thanked simply because the verb 'to thank' takes an object. Yet this does not mean that those who express themselves by finding something to occupy this grammatical slot must believe in the existence of the placeholders they use. Sometimes we choose something to fill these syntactical slots only as a form of expression, so that the things that we thank serve only as vehicles for articulating our gratitude. When that is the role that the objects of our thanksgiving play, then any particular placeholder can be freely exchanged for any other. 'Lucky stars' will serve as well as 'goodness.' Neither bears any ontological implications.

Of course, some people really *do* believe in astrology and really *do* attribute their good fortune to the influence of the stars. But this obvious point should not blind us to the more subtle point that people often thank the peculiar objects that they do, not to indicate that they know what to thank, but to confess that they *do not know what to thank*. Their gratitude wells up within, as it were, without any convenient place to go. When that happens, it makes little difference whether we thank the day we were born or whether we thank goodness. It all comes to the same thing: we feel thankful. We even understand it when one can find *nothing* to thank. If one simply says, 'Oh, I'm so grateful!' and we ask, 'To whom are you so grateful,' we might well be told, 'I don't know; I'm just so fortunate.' These words *too* count as an expression of gratitude.

So we need to be wary about assuming that there are or must be metaphysical presumptions beneath all expressions of gratitude. There are exceptions to the rule that one must believe in the existence of whatever it is that one thanks, and Beardsmore is right to point out that gratitude for one's life can transform the spirit of moral motivation without being dependent on the belief in G*od*.

Beardsmore alludes to another presumption that philosophers often make about gratitude (though he does not examine the point) – namely, that one can feel grateful only for what one regards as a *benefit*. But here too there are exceptions, as Patrick Fitzgerald has shown in a recent article on gratitude. Fitzgerald's example is the Dalai Lama, who feels sincerely grateful to the Chinese, the very people who forced him to flee from his native Tibet. On the level of common understanding, the Chinese invasion was indeed a harm. But on another and more important level, the Dalai Lama tells us that this harm represents an opportunity for spiritual enlightenment. Of course, we might say that this attitude is just a show of gratitude that papers over deep hostility; but this appears not to be the case. Nor can one say that the Dalai Lama thinks that the persecution of the Chinese will benefit the Tibetans by strengthening their Tibetan identity in resistance to the Chinese. He realizes full well that the Chinese takeover might be permanent and that a stronger Tibet might never emerge. In that sense they have been harmed. Yet he lets go of all resentment for this harm and gratefully accepts the difficulties that the Chinese have put in his way.[11]

This last example, like the previous one, reminds us that we should not make hasty assumptions about what must obtain if we are to feel grateful. We need not be grateful to someone, nor must we think of ourselves as beneficiaries in any ordinary sense if we are to feel grateful. Both of these points imply that we need not believe in the existence of God to be grateful for our lives and to express our gratitude in a changed, more spontaneous, and more willing attitude toward our obligations. These reminders scarcely comprise a moral theory or anything like it, but they show us that the sense of obligation need not arise from the religious idea that God is the author of our moral sense. Neither gratitude nor good will *requires* such a religious support, and we do not need a generalized theory to see that this is the case. All that is required is some conceptual reminders about the surprising variety of sense that we find in moral discussion.

Moral Disagreements and Their Resolution

Suppose, then, we agree that atheists can feel gratitude for their lives without believing that there is a God to thank. More disturbing is that fact that the same situation that inspires gratitude in one person might not inspire gratitude in another. Believers, for example, often speak of God's love even in the midst of extreme suffering. For them 'all things work together for good' (Romans 8:29). Yet the very same sufferings that work together for good for believers drive others to bitter resignation.[12] What are we to make of such disagreements when gratitude is in order for some while it is unthinkable for others? Both reactions are natural in the sense that neither arises out of any sort of thought or reflection, and neither follows from any indispensable logical ground. To that extent, there is no possibility of *resorting* to such grounds as a means of determining which of the two is 'rational'. But that again is Beardsmore's point: once we reach the primitive levels on which our reactions to events come naturally to us, the possibility of justifying these responses and the beliefs that reflect them comes to an end.

Beardsmore, unlike other philosophers, was willing to let such differences stand. Personally he might have felt more sympathy with those who speak of gratitude even in hard times; I don't know, though I feel sure that he would not have blamed those who, in the midst of such trials, could find no gratitude at all in their hearts. In any case, he did not believe that philosophy could marshal any arguments that might decide which of these two primitive reactions was proper. For nothing in the way of rational *inference* lies behind our disagreements on this fundamental level. Beardsmore realized this early on, and in *Moral Reasoning* he drew a fundamental distinction between two different kinds of moral disagreement, one of which arises over a dispute about the consistency and thoroughness of our judgements, and the other of which arises out of a disagreement in the evaluative perspectives that we rely on in reaching judgements of the first sort. His discussion focuses almost entirely on the latter.

The difficulty arises when our values *are* our criteria for moral judgement and we differ in our understanding of what these values are. Wherever there are such differences in value, they affect what we consider good moral reasons to be; and thus it is difficult to see what sense there is in relying on the usual model of rational justification to resolve disagreements that result. And yet we do not want to say that our values are irrational. That is the nub of the problem. Only *some* moral disagreements can be settled by ironing out questions of consistency, or by bringing into the discussion some forgotten but relevant considerations, or by extending an evaluative perspective toward neglected topics. The remaining problems are more fundamental than these because they concern the moral and evaluative perspectives that define what counts as a good reason for moral judgement in the first place.

If I had to say what enters into these fundamental considerations of value, I would say that if they yield themselves to anything at all, it is to extra-philosophical, ordinary means of persuasion – to being struck, to being drawn out of oneself, to having the kind of moral instruction that helps to form our selfhood, so that the conscience that we develop cannot be dismissed without the loss of selfhood that arises in its wake. A similar point can be made by saying that our views are shaped by relevant experiences together with pertinent discussions with others. The Department of Philosophy at Swansea was committed to philosophical discussion, and its Philosophical Society met regularly for decades. If after participating in this discussion a person changed his mind on an ethical issue, he might not have been convinced by a deductive argument. It is far more likely that he was impressed by the examples, the passionate presentations, and the general exchange that accompanied the issue. Changing one's mind as a result of reading, talking, experiencing, and considering the views of other in the light of one's own inward experience requires no excuse. It is an appropriate – and in that sense, a reasonable – way of examining and reexamining moral issues.

Beardsmore, however, discusses little of this, with one exception. The exception centers on the concept of primitive reactions, reactions that make it possible to learn any moral grammar. The notion of primitive reactions comes up in Wittgenstein, where he is thinking about how the rules of conceptual sense-making are to be followed. Superficially, we might think that we follow *other* rules that guide us in following the set of initial rules that differentiate between the meaningful and meaningless use of a term. On reflection, however, we realize that the procedure of citing rules – even if were involved in teaching people how to make sense in what they say – could not continue indefinitely. Sooner or later people must simply come to understand, to get the point at issue, and to internalize the sense of the terms involved. This is a logical point, and Wittgenstein notes that the possibility of this sort of primitive understanding depends on there being a kind of spontaneity in our reactions to various situations. This agreement in our spontaneous reactions gives language an unpremeditated foundation out of which it can emerge, so that what people do when they follow the guidance of others is not endlessly subject to private variation. For we do agree, not just in being instructed but in the primitive reactions that make such instruction possible. Without it, we would not be able to learn.[13]

Wittgenstein's example is learning the use of the word 'pain.' Saying that sympathetic responses to others' pains arise spontaneously or primitively means that we have a common behavioral background against which we learn the peculiar uses of the word pain. We depend on this background, for example, how to recognize and conceptually identify pain in other people and in ourselves. Thus, for example, we naturally reach out to soothe the spot where another has been hurt, we hold babies who are crying, we stop whatever we are doing when it is obvious that we are causing gratuitous pain, and so on. When we do these things, we do not *deliberate* about whether we should be doing them. We just do them, and this fact is important to our understanding of what pain is. In fact, were it not for this kind of agreement of practice in how we live, it is difficult to see how our understanding of responsibility to those in pain could ever have developed.

By the same token, when we as children are given a moral rule to follow (e.g., treat others with kindness), the spontaneous agreement in our sympathetic responses helps us to recognize the patterns of response that count as following this rule. The rule, as it were, blesses some of these responses so that we can see something of what the rule intends without the need for further instruction. In this way, our natural sympathetic tendencies assist us in understanding what we are to do in following the rule – that is, in understanding what kindness means – without having any explicit need for deliberation. On this behavioral level, then, we realize what instruction in the use of pain words means, and what the moral instruction about being kind to those in pain intends. Such unpremeditated agreement in adhering behaviorally to the norms of grammar goes hand in glove with what Wittgenstein called more generally an agreement in the form of our lives.[14] This, he says, is the sort of agreement that lies at the bottom of every language-game and makes learning it possible.[15]

In short, the grammar that we are trying to elucidate floats on something that is not secured by inference. The condition which makes this possible is the fact that at some point those who are learning to apply concepts or to follow rules go on for themselves without the never-ending need for further instruction about how the initial instruction about rule-following is to be understood in practice. Our language is built on this primitive, behavioral capacity to grasp what proper understanding entails. For we did not have to be told how to act sympathetically. That behavior came to us without thought, and so it must, if it is to enable the higher order of conceptual learning to take place.

Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan can help to illustrate the large issue that I am driving at. Beardsmore does not mention this story in the essay before us, but the parable received so much attention at Swansea that it seems a logical choice for the purpose.[16] The parable is a piece of moral instruction about following the love commandment, specifically, about how we are to know who our neighbors are. Instead of answering this question directly by enunciating a criterion, Jesus tells the parable. And when he has finished describing the man who was robbed and left to suffer while pious Jews passed him by, he asks the lawyer in a pointed way, ‘Which of the three men proved to be the neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’ Was it the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan? Had the lawyer not shared with the Samaritan the natural impulse to help those in need – to touch, as it were, the spot that hurts – the point of his question would have been lost. Presumably, the lawyer knew what it meant to help someone without having to think about it, but for some reason this reaction was blocked for the Priest and the Levite who passed the Samaritan by. Yet when he listens to the story, the lawyer – and presumably modern-day readers – is forced to admit that it was the Samaritan who knew who his ‘neighbors’ were. The neighbors are those who turn up needing our help. They do not belong to a group that has identifiable features that distinguish them as a class from non-neighbors. They are those that we are moved to help before any such classification takes place in our reasoning.

Remember that it was a lawyer, seeking to justify himself, who asked Jesus who our neighbors are. Evidently, he wanted an argument to specify just who counts and does not count as a neighbor. The response that Jesus gave him was pointed because it rejected the notion that moral behavior could be built on such definitions and on the inferences that follow from them, as if having that kind of guidance would enable us to work our way rationally to a better understanding of who our neighbors are. Understanding the principle of neighborly love, precisely because it does not begin with a restrictive definition of the neighbor, relies on a natural or instinctive response that *needs* no self-justification and that ultimately stems from a primitive response in us. That is why the example of the Samaritan carries such force even today; we do not need another rule (beyond the love commandment) to tell us whom we should care for. Here the foundation of moral understanding lies in a primitive response that is not a product of ratiocination but which, in fact, secures the understanding of the love commandment on the level of practice.[17]

Yet what about those who do not share the instinctive reactions of the Samaritan? Here there are two points that we need to separate. First, there is no *necessity* behind the primitive response of helpfulness, for we can easily imagine people for whom this spontaneous responsiveness is absent. The Jews who passed by the beaten man actually illustrate this point, since we might well imagine their reactions coming as naturally to them as the sympathetic reactions of the Samaritan came to him. Perhaps their selfish pre-occupation needed to be rationalized because their uncaring reactions to the Samaritan went against *their* primitive instincts. Sometimes it is true that such selfish reactions require a rationalization because people do feel a *primitive* impulse to help the needy person and must give themselves a reason for not doing it. Thus, the priest might say, 'If I touched the injured man, I would have to go through a lengthy process of ritually restoring my cleanliness as a priest.' Yet such self-justifying is not always required to off-set a primitive tendency. Sometimes tending to ourselves alone comes completely naturally to us, being maintained apart from any sort of conceptual directives. Certainly Beardsmore would not have denied this. Yet if there are people who naturally think only of themselves – who lack the kind of conscience that is morally informed by primitive acts of kindness – it is difficult for the rest of us to think of them as being moral at all.

This last *sort* of difficulty arises when our primitive reactions differ, and it is not the sort of difficulty that arises out of reflection. It is a more fundamental kind of impasse that consists of differences in moral sensibility. This, again, is the kind of moral disagreement that captivated Beardsmore and his like-minded colleagues at Swansea. To express our disagreement with those whose self-interest outweighs any natural sympathies, we can call such people irrational if we like. But if we do, these words will not imply that we can reveal their irrationality in an argument that they would appreciate. We cannot show, for example, that they have made a mistake in a commonly accepted manner of reasoning. The commonly accepted manner of reasoning will doubtless presume some sort of fundamental sense of responsibility on the part of morally caring individuals – and yet this is precisely what morally unsympathetic people lack. For them, the standards at issue are not commonly accepted in their primitive reactions or in their explicit thinking.

The logical point here is important. Normally, the concept of making a mistake depends upon the possibility of knowing aright. Thus, mistakes in this sense of the word can be *shown* to be mistakes by being contrasted with what we know, on good grounds, to be true. Yet when the foundations of judgement are disrupted by primitive differences in the way we think, then mistakes cannot be identified in this way. What is correct and incorrect then becomes *objectively* indeterminable for the parties involved. In such cases, one side might well *call* the other side mistaken or irrational, but what could this mean when the *standards* of argument are themselves in dispute? We can label our opponents as we like, but in cases such as those we are discussing, branding people as irrational or mistaken implies only that they do not believe what we believe. We hold certain beliefs – including moral principles – to be rational because they define what we mean by ‘rational’; and this agreement in what we take as rational is sustained by an agreement in practice in which we respond sympathetically to others. On that level, ‘rational’ people behave like this and ‘irrational’ ones like that. Good people (rational people) react in this way and not that way; they believe in the value of A rather than B. These are the norms by which we judge. But, of course, others may disagree and say the opposite. And then we are back where we started.

The point of all of this is something that Beardsmore understood very well, that every moral disagreement is not objectively solvable. Those who disagree with us about the most fundamental moral matters simply do not see them as we do, and we invite confusion if we think of this as a challenge to justify our fundamental intuitions on grounds of inference, as if that might show to everyone that we are right and they are wrong. This does not mean that moral judgements are arbitrary; it means the sureness that attends our moral sensibility does not depend on the classical ideal of justification on logical grounds. It has a different but not unreasonable or inappropriate source.

Moral Relativism and Moral Choices[18]

Beardsmore’s clarity on this last point – that is, on the fact that our fundamental values are not strictly derived from more basic rational grounds – does not *weaken* the hold that he has on his moral commitments. It is one thing to say that one’s basic values and moral commitments do not admit a justification on logical grounds, and quite another to say that one’s beliefs are unjustifiable in the pejorative sense of being arbitrary and unreasonable. To acknowledge the primitive or fundamental character of our evaluative orientation simply points out the logical fact that moral grounds are required for moral argument, and the evaluative commitments that represent the framework for our moral arguments do not proceed from a non-moral framework of thought. Such fundamental commitments lie too deep in our lives to admit the possibility of being treated as conjectures needing that kind of justification. Giving them up would leave us not only without a sense of how to reason morally, but would also leave us without an evaluative understanding of ourselves.

The confusion here between moral-grounds-to-stand-on and moral-stands-that-need-a-ground affects the very orientation that gives our reasoning its sense. If I doubted that we ought not to sell our children into slavery, for example, one would wonder what I would *not* doubt and what the values might be that I could appeal to. I could hardly cite prudential interests, such as the financial advantage, of selling my children. The barbarism of that owes itself not merely to appealing to money as a justification of selling my children, but to resorting to *any* self-interested, prudential, defense of my actions. If we tried to manufacture independent reasons for basic values that give our moral reasoning its guiding principles, we would distort the seriousness of moral judgement itself. We would imply that such moral truisms, as I've said before, were debatable moral options, whereas the adoption of such standards is anything but optional. We teach our children *what* to value in teaching them *how to understand* responsibility and ethical obligation. And we expect reasonable people to internalize, not just these basic principles, but their application in the moral thinking that they underwrite.

Yet if there is nothing that we can do to argue rationally for what we regard as moral truisms, what force can one's commitment to them have? Or is moral believing, on this level, arbitrary after all? I think that there is more here to Beardsmore's approach than meets the eye. One point I have already alluded to: we have no reason to think that such fundamental commitments are irrational or arbitrary unless we have come to this commitment as a choice that *should* have been justified against other alternatives. Let's say that we have learned that people in other cultures sometimes sell or abandon their children. Does their practice mean that we have chosen to protect our children from an array of equally possible moral options? This fact about others' practice – that they sometimes do leave their children out to die – does not create a demand for us to justify our moral attitude about protecting our children on logically prior grounds, much less on grounds that would be intelligible to them. It only seems to do so because it suggests that there is *for us* a range of moral alternatives here, and that we have come to our moral views by choosing from among these alternatives. Had we in fact chosen in this way, the question, 'On what basis did you choose?' would make sense; and the inability to answer this question would make us wonder whether our choices were governed by appropriate logical standards. The problem with this line of reasoning is *not* the view that rational choices are governed by rational criteria, but the view that our fundamental commitments, including the commitment we have to the value of our children, ever appeared on a menu of such choices. Instead of needing to be justified in this way, this commitment is *more secure* as a moral judgement than such a view would imply.

That is why we are so bewildered in the face of those who kill their children, for then we find ourselves outside the limits of those disagreements that rational argument can manage. We do not understand what the grounds of their thinking could *possibly* be, and therefore we cannot see their behavior as a species of *moral* behavior at all. This, however, says nothing about the arbitrariness of our own behavior. We certainly need not confess that our moral ways of thinking and living are on a par with those who leave their children out to die. That again would suggest that the moral attitudes in question are the result of moral choices made from a range of equally possible alternatives. But this again is not the case, and the point bears repeating because the fear of moral relativism is lodged in this misunderstanding.

I do not know any of Beardsmore's work in which he discusses the way in which we acquire moral values or standards of judgement, though the need for such a discussion seems obvious here. Again, my own view is that our values are acquired by way of moral instruction, and that this instruction ultimately depends on certain primitive reactions, which are encouraged and commended in the communication of ethical concepts. Obviously, more might be said about this. Yet the sketchiness of this suggestion does not affect Beardsmore's point. When truly basic moral differences confront us, it is our inability to provide rational justifications for our moral commitments that reflects everything we know good moral sense to be. Were we to surrender to the thought that our fundamental values are arbitrary, we would thereby forfeit the very sense of moral deliberation. Some values must serve us as anchors to orient our understanding, and these anchors cannot be dislodged if we are to reason as we do. This means that we cannot frame certain morally impossible options as rational alternatives to begin with. The very idea of treating the wanton abandonment of children as a moral possibility is itself a kind of moral lapse, as if one had forgotten what it means to be moral. In such an atmosphere, no moral arguments can carry any weight.

The Universalizability Thesis: Another Illusion of Moral Reason

In a typescript entitled, 'People,' Beardsmore returns to the general theme of moral reasoning in a manner that is more exacting than anything that I have said so far. His target, sometimes called ‘prescriptivism’, is the widely accepted view that moral and evaluative judgements presume a set of specific features that all good acts and valued things share. These features represent the morally *significant* aspects of things that are valued – i.e., the properties that are responsible for our positive or negative evaluations of the things that possess them. Thus, they are what make good things good or bad things bad, and they explain the generality of our judgements about whole classes of objects. Thus, if we behave morally in one way toward animals and another way toward human beings, there must be a morally significant difference between the two. This difference, moreover, must be *independently* specifiable. Something more than the fact that animals are animals and people are people, in other words, needs to be said to specify what people have and animals lack that accounts for our difference in the way that we treat them morally. Of course, one must first determine what the morally significant features of objects are, and on that point the defenders of this idea are notoriously uncertain. Yet Beardsmore does not focus his criticism on this point. Rather, he attacks the underlying idea that a selection of morally significant properties is essential to our evaluations in the first place.

To be more precise, the prescriptivist’s claim is that that the rationality of moral judgements depends on our being able to isolate one or another characteristic in terms of which differences in our moral judgements can be explained. A judgement is rational if one can cite a reason for it, and in the case of moral reasoning, the same principle must hold. People must have reasons for treating human beings in one way and animals in another, and these reasons are to be found in a set of properties that humans have and animals lack. Here the rationality of one’s judgements does not consist in the appropriateness of *what* one values; it consists in the rule-like procedure of subjecting one’s judgement to the principle that everything that possesses the same significant properties must be evaluatively treated in the same way. Beardsmore rejects this thesis. It is simply false that all of the moral judgements that we feel entitled to hold are the consequences of generalizing over the significant features of one class as opposed to another.[19] This distorts the character of our moral judgements and *a fortiori* distorts the nature of moral reasoning. What can be said for these claims?

His arguments are all important contributions to moral philosophy. The first thing that he points out is the ‘breathtaking generality’ of trying to distinguish between humans and animals in a way that would justify the different ways in which we treat each. For one thing, our treatment of both animals and humans is remarkably diverse. We do not treat our pets as we do other animals, or our family members as we do strangers, etc. Most of us think that it is permissible to eat some animals, at least under certain conditions, but we do not think it appropriate to eat all animals regardless of the circumstances. Most of us, for example, would not eat our pets. And if asked why we eat fish purchased at the market but not the cat who just died, it is enough to answer simply, 'The cat was our pet!' Here it is pointless to search for an *additional* justification by trying to isolate a feature that only our pets have and other animals do not.[20]

When we look for a morally significant difference that characterizes a certain class of objects and that justifies us in treating this class in some special way, there is no guarantee that we will be able to find one. I may wonder what it is about human beings that renders them worthy of my respect for their life and interests, but it is a mistake to think that I must be able to satisfy my curiosity by isolating a morally significant feature that the whole class shares. I might say that human beings can return love, that they exercise free will, that they bear the burden of being conscious about their death, etc.; and yet there are human beings that lack these features without thereby forfeiting the moral respect that we owe them. There are those who live in persistent vegetative states, for example. Yet the fact that such people lack some or all of the qualities that I just mentioned does not mean that we owe them no respect. Here we respect people *despite* the fact that they lack the characteristic features that we might think determine our moral regard. When our efforts to apply the universalizability thesis keep failing us in this way, we can only say what we should have said to begin with: we respect people *as human beings*, not because they have some additional or special feature that can be singled out as the basis for our moral regard. This type of objection seems to plague all versions of the prescriptivist's thesis.

If, after all, the moral treatment of people is based on their having certain properties (other than the fact that they are human beings), then we might ask why we should treat *that* property as the reason for the discriminations that we make in our behavior toward them. Is there some *other* property which this first property must have (perhaps a more specific aspect of the property) in order for us to be able to say that our appraisal is rational in the sense of being governed by a consistent rule?

> Indeed, it is quite obvious that if sometimes we respond to x but not to y because of some property z which x though not y possesses, then we must respond to z, but not the absence of z, without necessarily being able to identify any further characteristic to justify our responses. Otherwise we are led into an infinite regress of justifications for justifications, with the result that nothing is ever justified.[21]

As an illustration, Beardsmore rejects the demand to show that racism, for example, is irrational simply by proving that racists have violated the principle of universalizing moral judgements according to a certain property. That is not the way to articulate one's disagreement with racists. It misrepresents the logic involved. The defenders of the moral theory in question presume that racists *do* base their respect for certain people on the characteristics that white people have and that colored people lack. But then the racists do not extend their positive valuation of white people to individuals in the colored races who have the same features. Thus, if some members of colored races turn out to have the same morally significant characteristics as members of the white race – say, perseverance and industriousness – this does *not* change the racist's view. They still feel entitled to discriminate against all colored peoples. In general, since no property or set of properties will divide perfectly along racial lines, racists are bound to contradict themselves, approving of features found in the white race and not approving of colored individuals with the same features. Or they will disapprove of certain features found in the colored races but not disapprove of whites with the same characteristics. Racists, on this prescriptivist view, are precisely those who do *not* change their views when such inconsistencies are pointed out to them, and that is why their views should be rejected. These views are rejected not because they are *morally abhorrent*, but because racists are being *irrational in their inconsistent manner of thinking.*

As Beardsmore points out, this way of conceiving of the irrationality of racism implies that racists *would be* rational if they simply were consistent in universalizing over the racial features that they think are morally significant. The problem with this is that it deflects criticism away from the moral question about what is significant to begin with, as it says nothing about the moral appropriateness of the features that the racists supposedly generalize over. To take a simple example, consider those racists who think that what makes people worthy of moral respect is the color of their skin, and imagine that they consistently hold to this view. Here one cannot explain what is wrong with this by saying that racists do not think rationally because they are not consistent in the generalizations they make. The objection to racism has to be based on the appropriateness of taking skin as the basis for the moral appraisal of human beings. But this is not an objection that prescriptivists are prepared to make. For their principle of moral reasoning does nothing to define what is or is not a worthy feature of moral discrimination. It says simply that a rational person must have an answer to the question, ‘Why do you value one race above another?’ And this requirement is satisfied by the response, ‘Because they (the favored races) have white skin.’ In short, the prescriptivist makes moral rationality dependent on consistency, not on what one is morally consistent about.

Beardsmore, therefore, simply rejects the claim that people are being irrational if they do not couch their judgements by universalizing over morally significant properties in the things that they value.

> Of course, if I was desperate to show that the racist was *irrational*, then it might be necessary for me to try to make use of the universalizability principle in the manner of Peter Singer, but then why should anyone want to show that the racist is *irrational*. True, a central theme in Singer’s writing, and in the writings of those who share his general approach is the desire to show that certain sorts of moral viewpoints – racism, sexism, eating meat – are in some way irrational or conceptually confused. But, I, for myself, find this rather hard to fathom.[22]

The reason why Beardsmore finds the efforts of people like Singer hard to fathom is not that he – Beardsmore – does not condemn racism. Quite the contrary. Beardsmore strongly condemns it – but he does not condemn it by saying that it is *irrational*, as if the racist had violated a formal rule of judgement. That is too weak to capture the *moral* sense of his rejection of racism.

> . . . though I should certainly say of the Nazi treatment of the Jews that it was an evil abomination, I find it difficult to see what it would add to this if one were to say that the justifications given for it were confused. After all, I find the fairly common practice of torturing one’s political opponents in order to stamp out political opposition about as morally repulsive a practice as might be imagined; but confused or irrational? But as I say, I do not think that the principle of universalizability has any tendency to show that they are.[23]

That is what Beardsmore objected to, the suggestion that racists or torturers were confused in using the universalizability thesis as a rule of reason. Far better to expose the rawness of moral disagreement on this level by saying that racists and torturers are morally repulsive irrespective of their ability to apply such rules. Then at least it would be clear that the disagreement in question is a specifically *moral* disagreement, rather than a dispute about the consistency of their application of a general rule of reason.

I don't think that he would have complained if ordinary people (non-philosophers) wanted to use the word 'irrational' in describing racists or torturers, as long as *that were simply another way of expressing the extent of their disagreement*. But he would have rejected the further implication that such people can be shown to have made an error in judgement, as if this error were a false or inconsistent inference of some kind. The racist's ideas are deplorable, but it does no good to represent them as making that kind of error. All that the racists need to do to escape the charge of racism on the prescriptivist's view, after all, is to make skin color the property that *they see* as accounting for the different moral worth of people. Here there need be no inconsistency involved in applying that as a rigorous standard. Yet this result cannot be right. We should have said that their reasoning goes wrong from the start, not because it is inconsistent, but it consistently applies a morally repugnant view.

Moral Epistemology

Throughout his work in ethics, Beardsmore endeavored to show that we cannot be moral agents without entering into a certain form of moral understanding. To enter into this shared understanding – this grammar of moral sense – means internalizing the moral values that belong to it, so that one thinks and lives by this understanding of one's life. That is how we acquire our moral sensibility. Accepting the values enshrined in such a way of thinking becomes part of self-understanding, which in turn means that some behaviors are ruled out as morally impossible acts. That is why there is such a thing as people's moral integrity; they acquire a moral identity and a moral character, and that involves the acceptance of certain limits in what they see as morally possible and impossible acts. It is this acceptance of moral limits to one's behavior that makes a person moral in the deepest sense of the word, not their compliance with a formal rule of rationality or a generalized ideal of rational justification. Now I want to reach further by drawing out some of the hidden epistemological implications of this view.

I think that the general, grammatical, orientation of Beardsmore's ethics suggests that some of the concepts that have long been banished from moral philosophy, notably the concepts of truth and reality, can be brought back into it. Winch acknowledged the same point when he said that

> We cannot deny the admissibility of such locutions as: 'It's a fact that my behavior was squalid.' We cannot deny that someone may, with perfect linguistic propriety, endorse my remark by saying: 'That's true,' or contest it with: 'That's not true.'[24]

But Winch went on to say that is also seems quite natural to contrast the difference between these sorts of moral truths and empirical truths by saying that 'one judgement states a fact about the situation while the other expresses an attitude toward the facts of a situation.'[25] I think that Winch's remarks here are typical of the Wittgensteinians in the Swansea school. They all recognized the importance of making *distinctions* between the meanings of terms used in one context and the meanings of the same terms used in another setting, and the uses of the word 'truth' and 'fact' offer a case in point.

To clarify, we can take a convenient example provided by Raimond Gaita in *A Common Humanity.*[26] There he speaks of Australian officials who imposed forcible sterilization on Aboriginals in the early part of this century. In so doing, he says, those responsible failed to recognize the full humanity of the Aboriginal people. That is, they failed to see something *that was plainly before them*. It is difficult to disagree with Gaita's description here without appearing to be a racist. Can one say, for example, that the humanity of the Aboriginal people is *not* plain to us? Were the Australian officials *not* in fact insensitive to this reality when they recommended forcible sterilization? Perhaps one might object to using the word 'reality' in this connection without objecting to the spirit of Gaita's remarks. Yet the denial of these things – saying that there is no moral reality, no moral truth of the matter, and no human significance in the Aboriginals – is even more misleading. For it is entirely natural to speak in these ways, and were one to object to such remarks, we would wonder whether there were not ulterior motives (i.e., racist feelings) behind the complaints. Here, ironically, where we are least able to justify our moral judgements is where we are most likely to speak of truth and reality.

After all, when moral judgements are accepted as *givens* – i.e., as foundational elements in a moral outlook – the logical sense of these judgements *is expressed* by calling them moral truths, moral facts, or insights into moral reality. Such judgements are expressed in this way for exactly the same reason that they are said to be rational, *not because* they can be justified as inferences from prior grounds but *because* they are constitutive of what we take good judgement in moral matters to be. The truths of morality, one might say, belong to what is *commonplace* in morality; and this includes the assertive expression of the basic moral values that serve us as standards. The reality that these truths disclose is simply the reality that one "sees" when one understands these values. This, of course, is not the sort of reality that one sees when one is simply describing the world; and the sense in which the moralist sees reality is decidedly not the same sense invoked in scientific contexts. Of course not! But these moral expressions *do* have grammatical sense nonetheless, and it is important to be clear about this fact.

Clarity on this last point is essential if one is to defend Beardsmore and the other Wittgensteinians at Swansea against the charge that they are relativists, non-cognitivists, and fideists – still a widely held view. In truth, the grammatical approach the Swansea philosophers took over from Wittgenstein exposes the crudity of these charges and forces one in the direction of more discriminating questions. To see what I mean, take the concept of a fact, something that most of us think that we understand. Generally, when we speak of facts, we attend to a sense of the word 'fact' that is particularly familiar to us, forgetting that there are actually several very different senses of the term. Thus, most of us would not remember that we speak of moral facts, simply because we have cognitive, descriptive, facts in mind, facts that have no essential personal significance for us. Yet as Winch notes and Gaita implies, in some contexts it makes perfectly good sense to speak of moral facts. By a moral fact, I mean something that can be relied on, and something that *is to be relied on* if one is to enter into moral reasoning. In this sense of the word, facts do not *contrast* with values but are value judgements themselves; and the judgement that Aboriginals are human beings deserving of respect is a good example. It is not a value-free natural description; it is an evaluative appraisal that frames the discussion of Aboriginal rights in a moral context. If Aboriginal peoples are to be treated morally, then we must start with the fact that they are entitled to moral respect as human beings. In expressing this point as a fact, we do not mean that it is a scientific fact. We mean that it is a rudimentary insight into something that lies plainly, reliably, before us.

In 'On Not Worshipping the Facts', an article published decades ago, J. R. Lucas pointed out that there was no *essential* connection between the concept of a fact and the notion of an empirical finding.[27] An empirical finding, a piece of descriptive data, an observed result – all these are facts in a perfectly familiar sense of the word. Yet we might be so wedded to this sense of the word that we think of such empirical facts as the only facts that there are. Yet there are other senses in which we speak of facts where the context no longer involves descriptions, findings, or the reports of experiments and observations; and Lucas reminds us of these contexts. He asks us to remember that facts include anything that can be taken for granted, rather like Wittgenstein's certainties. In this sense, facts do not contrast with values but with hypotheses, contentions, or disputable claims. Facts are secure judgements, safe in normal contexts from the critical inquiry that applies to other judgements, and this applies whether we are discussing facts in a scientific context or not. As we approach our most certain moral convictions, where we cannot help but to feel that those who disagree with us are wrong, then we find ourselves speaking easily of moral facts and moral truths, just as Gaita did in condemning racism.

Insofar as there are such givens in morality, then, these same givens – moral certainties, true insights, whatever one wants to call them – can be meaningfully described as facts. Thus, I take it for granted that we ought not to leave our female infants out to die. To regard this as a morally impossible option is, in effect, to say that we have no doubts about this at all; it can be accepted as the common coinage of what we take as ethical discussion. In that sense it is a fact, an obviously true judgement that can be presumed as belonging to the unquestioned presuppositions of moral discussion. For such facts as these ordinarily need not even be mentioned, for who among us, among those who know what we know about morality, would not agree? It seems clear that there must be such moral facts simply because there must be some common ground in judgements for moral thinking to proceed. For us, and for all those with whom we can have a moral discussion, this common ground is actually interwoven with the understanding of particular moral concepts and moral values. Yet none of this means that these facts can somehow be *shown* to be facts in the sense in which they might be empirically confirmed or derived from anything that is more certain. It means only that when it comes to the question of their epistemological grounds, such facts are immediately secure because they are bound up with the role that they play in what we know as moral reasoning. If someone does not accept such a claim as a moral fact, the framework of moral thinking for those who do accept this fact comes unglued and one is at a loss to treat the disagreement in a morally reasonable way.

Admittedly, there might be such disagreements. Sometimes people do challenge our moral certainties. But when this happens, the logical *nature* of our disagreements changes into a difficulty that can no longer be straightforwardly negotiated by reason. We might think that such disagreements should in principle be subject to some form of objective and rational determination; but the mere fact that we can imagine such disagreements does not mean that they must be subject to justification on rational grounds.

The same goes for the concept of reality, which we also commonly use in connection with moral insight. Obviously, this reality does not consist in what we see empirically or of what we discover objectively or impersonally about the world around us. It consists in what we come to see as our moral vision opens up. Thus, when we speak of the realities of the moral world, we mean that moral judgements are incumbent on as human beings, who are trying to find our way in the life that surrounds us. Here again we have to resist the temptation to think of reality solely in terms of empirical reality, as if there were no other realities to be met with in human experience. We do not first have to resolve the question 'Is there a moral reality out there?' *as a descriptive issue* before we can know that these moral realities exist. Our confidence that there is a moral reality depends entirely on entering another, non-descriptive and non-empirical dimension of understanding, which we discover only in coming to understand the point of evaluative considerations. As we learned to follow the ways in which moral concepts are used in making moral judgements, we grew into the grammar of moral discourse; and as a result, we find ourselves with moral commitments that we cannot imagine being without. And our confidence in speaking of moral realities is simply the other side of these same moral convictions.

What none of this means, of course, is that moral judgement is anything like empirical, objective, or purely descriptive judgement. Only the words – 'reality,' 'fact,' 'truth,' 'seeing what is the case' – are the same; whereas their place in our discourse reveals a grammatical sense quite unlike the uniform meaning that one might expect. The fact that such terms are used in a variety of different contexts suggests only that there are judgements to be made in these contexts. But it does not tell us what these judgements are like, how they are to be made, or anything else about the distinctive epistemology that lies behind their usage. That remains for grammatical studies to clarify.

Nevertheless, the fact that there is some sense of ‘reality,’ of ‘truth,’ and of ‘facts’ to be made out by such grammatical studies gives us a *prima facie* reason for thinking that moral judgement is far from being an arbitrary choice. It is anchored in facts in the same sense that any framework of judgement is anchored in its own certainties; and being anchored in such certainties, it is, in a sense, anchored in reality.

As I said at the outset, then, some moral issues can be appropriately framed as contentions that rest on the moral arguments that we can give for them, but this feature of rationality does not hold for all moral issues. The more confident claims that we make cannot be justified in the ordinary sense at all, and thus are not objective in the sense of being independently subject to rational determination. Our most basic value commitments belong to this class, and our certainty about them is, in the end, of a piece with the certainty that moral judgements are incumbent upon us. None of these judgements are made apart from a sense of what moral thinking is, and that means that none are made apart from a background of moral convictions about moral realities.

In the end, this view of moral judgement, which is roughly that of Dick Beardsmore, simply means that moral judgements are *different* from other judgements, not that moral judgements are arbitrary, inappropriate, or unrealistic. We do not always agree in the most basic of our moral convictions, but that does not mean that they are unreasonable if we cannot subject them to an independent, rationally telling, means of justification. This line of argument grows out of Wittgenstein, but it runs contrary to many over-simplified misconceptions of where Wittgenstein’s philosophy actually leads.

NOTES

[1] *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, January, 1965, pp. 3-12.

[2] R. W. Beardsmore was born in 1944. He taught at University College of North Wales, Bangor from 1968 to 1987. He then taught at University College, Swansea, serving as Head of Department from 1992 until his death in 1997.

[3] ‘The Censorship of Works of Art,’ in *Philosophy and Fiction*, ed. Peter LaMarque (Aberdeen, 1983), esp. pp. 93-95, 100-102.

[4] In *Religion and Morality*, ed. by D. Z. Phillips (New York, 1996), pp. 235-49.

[5] ‘Modern Moral Philosophy,’ *The Collected Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe*, Vol. III (Oxford, 1981), p. 30.

[6] Peter Winch also argues against Anscombe on this very issue, but his primary point is that moral sensitivity to particular people is a backdrop to understanding what it means to love God, and not the reverse. See *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 159-166.

[7] 'Atheism and Morality,' p. 238.

[8] Though Wittgenstein does not discuss moral examples in *On Certainty*, he might have – as long as such certainties were such that we would have to have a special reason to doubt them, that their truth is ordinarily beyond dispute, and that there is therefore no reason even to formulate them in most ethical disputes. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (New York, 1972).

[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1953), para. 580.

[10] Gaita's remarks are found in *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (London, 1991), pp. 214-15. They are taken up by Beardsmore in 'Atheism and Morality,' *Religion and Morality*, pp. 243-44.

[11] Patrick Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice," *Ethics* 109, (October 1998), 119-53, esp. p. 124ff. Beardsmore notes the same attitude among Christians, when, at the end of his essay, he notes that they are expected to be grateful for bad fortune as well as for good fortune. 'Atheism and Morality,' in *Religion and Morality*, p. 248.

[12] See also Rush Rhees, *On Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge, 1997), ch.13.

[13] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. By G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley, 1970), para. 540ff.

[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, para. 358; *Philosophical Investigations*, para. 241.

[15] See *On Certainty*, para. 110, 204, 474.

[16] See for example, Peter Winch, '*Eine Einstellung zur Seele*' and 'Who is My Neighbour?' in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford, 1987), chs. 10 and 11, pp. 140 – 166; D. Z. Phillips, 'My Neighbor and My Neighbors' in *Interventions in Ethics* (SUNY Press, 1992), ch. 17, pp. 229-50; Lars Hertzberg, 'On Being Neighborly' in *The Possibilities of Sense* (London, 2002), pp. 24-38.

[17] Winch argues somewhat differently for a similar conclusion. He suggests that neighbor love begins in particular reactions to individuals, and only then is generalized into a commandment such as the one Jesus cites. See 'Who is My Neighbor?' in *Trying to Make Sense*.

[18] In comparison to the account to follow, Winch gives a quite different, but nonetheless Wittgensteinian, answer to moral relativism. See *Trying to Make Sense*, chs. 12 and 13.

[19] Winch argues for much the same conclusion in *Trying to Make Sense*, pp. 169 f., 175-76.

[20] Typescript entitled 'People,' pp. 5-6.

[21] Ibid., pp. 11.

[22] Ibid., p. 13.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Winch, *Trying to Make Sense*, pp. 169.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity* (London, 2000).

[27] J. R. Lucas, ‘On Not Worshiping the Facts,’ *Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1958), pp. 144-56.

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Chapter 9

Rhees, Wittgenstein, and the Swansea School

MARIO VON DER RUHR

I

In his book *Philosophical Analysis,* which chronicles the development of analytic philosophy between the two World Wars, J. O. Urmson rightly notes that 'the division of philosophers into schools is always a somewhat artificial matter, since every philosopher worthy of the name will say what he thinks, whether it agrees with the thoughts of his colleagues or no'.[1] In regard to logical positivism, he admits, the term 'movement' may not have been entirely misguided, since its advocates did share a set of basic tenets about the nature of philosophy, the conditions of meaningful speech, the futility of metaphysics, etc. The analytic philosophers of his own time, on the other hand, 'fight shy of the sort of general philosophical pronouncements which could count as basic tenets', their views and methods revealing at best a certain kind of 'family resemblance'.[2] Urmson's observations also hold for the group of philosophers known as the 'Swansea School'. Unlike, for example, the Vienna Circle, the Marburg School, or the Frankfurt School, whose inquiries were largely focused on scientific method and critical Marxism, the philosophical activities of the Swansea School neither revolved around a particular branch of philosophy, nor were they intended to yield a shared doctrine or commonly accepted 'solutions' to particular philosophical issues or puzzles. On the contrary, – and as Cockburn, Hertzberg and Edelman have emphasized in their discussions of Rhees, Winch, and Phillips – the idea of philosophy as a wholly disinterested analysis of impersonal intellectual problems was just as inimical to the Swansea School's philosophical enterprise as the desire to produce a catalogue of fundamental truths about the relation between language, thought, and world, or to promote a particular *Weltanschauung* or socio-political programme. If talk of a 'School' seems nevertheless appropriate, it is because its members invariably wrote and taught in the *spirit* of Wittgenstein's work, eschewing jargon and obfuscation, distrusting philosophical *theories* and systems modelled on the template of scientific inquiry, exposing idle linguistic wheels and (metaphysical) pseudo-explanations, and investing their clarificatory endeavors with a significance that was both intellectual *and* existential. ‘Work on philosophy,’ as Wittgenstein always insisted, ‘is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)’,[3] where this *seeing* is, in turn, influenced by one’s culture’s dominant paradigms of inquiry. These paradigms, as Wittgenstein notes in the *Blue Book*, can be seriously distorting, not least in the context of *philosophical* inquiry:

> Our craving for generality has another main source: our preoccupation with the method of science. I mean the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws. . . . Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really is ‘purely descriptive’. . . . Instead of ‘craving for generality’ I could also have said ‘the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case’.[4]

I think it would be fair to say that Wittgenstein’s observation on the precarious prestige of scientific methodology and the subtle ways in which it may reinforce a natural ‘craving for generality’, and his requirement that one attend to particulars – whether in an analysis of the relation between language and the world, reflections on epistemological issues, elucidations of moral or aesthetic phenomena, or grammatical expositions of key religious concepts – was shared by all members of the Swansea School.[5] Indeed, the need for attention to ‘the particular case’, so important to Wittgenstein’s own elucidatory task, also explains the School’s concern with *literature* as a distinctive mode of understanding and potential corrective to philosophical confusion, especially in the area of moral phenomenology. One thinks here, for example, of Peter Winch’s fine discussion of Hermann Melville’s *Billy Budd* (in *Ethics & Action*, 1972), Roy Holland’s reflections on Joseph Conrad (in *Against Empiricism,* 1980), İlham Dilman’s interest in Dostoyevsky, (*Raskolnikov’s Rebirth*, 2000), H. O. Mounce’s work on Tolstoy (*Tolstoy on Aesthetics*, 2001), R. W. Beardsmore’s *Art and Morality* (1971), or D. Z. Phillips’s philosophical exploration of contemporary fiction (*From Fantasy to Faith*, 2006). The thought that in so far as literature is able to capture and preserve the irreducible uniqueness of the particular it can also make a useful companion to philosophical analysis, not merely as an illustrative device, but as a separate source of illumination, is, of course, congruent with Wittgenstein's own reflections on the arts. In *Culture and Value*, for example, he noted: 'People nowadays think scientists are there to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to entertain them. That the latter have something to teach them, that never occurs to them.'[6] Recalling Wittgenstein's concern – most notably in the *Tractatus* – with the nature of ethical, aesthetic and religious phenomena, and his rejection of idle chatter about value judgments more generally, it is easy to see why the Swansea School was keen to explore these issues further, and in ways that echoed Wittgenstein's observation about the edifying qualities of art. In spite of their diverse backgrounds and special research interests, and a conception of philosophical inquiry that was irreducible to a simple formula or doctrine, the Swansea School clearly agreed with Wittgenstein about what kinds of issues mattered in philosophy, and how one had to go about tackling them, and it is, above all else, this philosophical kinship that ultimately licenses the description 'Swansea School'. Whether its members would have been happy with the label themselves is, of course, debatable. Reminiscing on his own philosophical training in the early days of Swansea's philosophy department, D. Z. Phillips recalls:

> The labels *Swansea School of Philosophy,* or *Swansea Wittgensteinians*, were not given to themselves by Swansea's philosophers. They are labels given by others, sometimes in agreement, sometimes in disagreement, but sometimes in anger and hostility, not least by philosophers who are themselves influenced by Wittgenstein.[7]

Phillips goes on to say that, in the early 1950s, after Winch and Holland had come to Swansea from Oxford, one certainly could not have spoken of a 'school' of any kind, but that this had changed by the mid 1960s: 'By the time my teachers departed, the description 'Swansea School' had arrived, and was even applied to them thereafter, and to İlham Dilman, H. O. Mounce, R. W. Beardsmore and myself, who taught at Swansea for many years, the last until 2001'.[8] Phillips also points out that, contrary to what might have been expected, he did not encounter Wittgenstein through an explicit discussion of his work, but rather 'through *the way* I heard a whole range of topics being discussed.'[9] İlham Dilman, who received much of his formative philosophical training at Cambridge and came to be strongly influenced by John Wisdom there, underwent a similar development. As Chryssi Sidiropoulou notes, when he was asked in 2001 what role Wittgenstein had played in his own life's work, he explained:

> I am not a disciple; I have not been his contemporary. But having found my philosophical feet in an environment which he has made possible, and thanks to those who have made his writings public, I have had first-hand contact with his thoughts in these publications. I am greatly indebted to them; I would not be where I am today without them.[10]

Phillips's and Dilman's encounters with Wittgenstein were fairly typical of the way in which the latter's legacy was transmitted to subsequent generations of students – at least outside Swansea, where traditional lectures on Wittgenstein's writings continued to form an integral part of the honours curriculum well into the late 1990s. This indirect approach was particularly true for Winch, who always felt a strong reluctance to teach Wittgenstein formally, and who, even when he was conducting a full raft of undergraduate and graduate seminars at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), much preferred to invite a small group of interested graduate students, colleagues and friends to his home on Saturday afternoons, to go through *Philosophical Investigations* or *On Certainty* paragraph by paragraph. Not that he wanted to dictate this procedure to others, but *for him* it remained the best way to come to grips with the difficulties of Wittgenstein's work. These extra-curricular discussions were always open-ended and would continue throughout the academic session. Those who, like this author, were privileged to participate, found the meetings invaluable, not least because of the penetrating insights Winch – who, unlike most members of the Swansea School, also had a superb command of German – invariably brought to the readings. Being something of a *connoisseur* of fine coffee, Winch served that, too, though the general atmosphere at his home hardly resembled that of a Viennese coffee house, where people might come and go as they pleased. On the contrary, regular attendance and a serious commitment to the discussion were considered *de rigueur,* partly because of what was required by a sustained and joint effort at understanding, and partly because of Winch's wariness of the philosophical sightseer or *voyeur*, who merely wanted to 'check out the Wittgenstein group' because it sounded intriguing or esoteric. In this regard, Winch's attitude to teaching, and the tone he set for his lectures and seminars, was a lot like Wittgenstein's, who lamented to G. H. von Wright on 9 March 1939:

> I'm sorry I caused you the trouble of writing to me. I shall try to explain why the presence of two new people in my class, the other day, greatly disturbed me. – I am, in my classes, doing my utmost to explain a *very* difficult matter to the students who have been attending my classes this term. I know that it is quite

> impossible for any one coming in in the middle, or at *the end*, of the term to get an idea of what we really are driving at. In fact he must necessarily get wrong ideas. I hope you will understand this, & if you do you will also understand why being aware of this fact disturbs me a lot when I should be concentrating entirely on my subject. If I could, as many other people can, prepare my lectures in writing & then read them off in front of the class the presence of new people would not disturb me. But as I'm unable to do this & have to think things out afresh while I'm talking I am very easily disturbed.[11]

II

In his Introduction to *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, Dewi Phillips has provided an excellent sketch of Rhees's life and work, and there is no need to reproduce it here in detail.[12] However, a few points are worth emphasizing. One, to which Lars Hertzberg has already drawn attention on a previous occasion,[13] is that it would be a serious mistake to demote Rhees to a philosophical Eckermann, as it were, a mere editor and occasional exegete of his mentor's *oeuvre*, who published little himself and whose impact on the intellectual culture of his time remained largely negligible. While it is true that Rhees – like Wittgenstein – published little during his lifetime, Cockburn's paper confirms yet again just how forceful and independent a thinker he was, in spite of what must have been a (natural) temptation in all of Wittgenstein's students, viz. to passively submit to the genius of their *spiritus rector* and to treat his pronouncements as virtually unassailable. As Phillips reminds us in a special issue of *Philosophical Investigation*, published on the 50th anniversary of Wittgenstein's death:

> Rhees came to be critical of certain aspects of Wittgenstein's thought as early as four years after the publication of the *Investigations,* and probably earlier. He thought he had let the analogy between language and games run away with him, but wanted to develop further the important notion of 'a form of life'.[14]

The material published from Rhees's *Nachlass*, especially *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, not only contains sustained discussions of these issues, but reveals that the critical originality of his thought extended well beyond his engagement with Wittgenstein, to cover a broad and impressive range of philosophical topics including Greek philosophy, moral and political philosophy, philosophy of religion,[15] aesthetics, and, equally importantly, the work of the French thinker Simone Weil (1909-1943).[16] Another point to remember about Rhees's intellectual development is that, when he began to attend Wittgenstein's lectures in Cambridge (1936), he was already a mature, 30-year old graduate student who, having begun his university education at the University of Rochester (USA), completed – with distinction – an M.A. programme in *Mental Philosophy* at Edinburgh, served as Assistant Lecturer at Manchester for four years, spent a year in Innsbruck studying with the Brentano scholar Alfred Kastil, embarked on a Ph.D. programme with G. E. Moore at Cambridge, *and* worked at *Messrs Deighton, Bell & Co.*'s bookshop[17] – hardly the biography of an uneventful and intellectually impoverished life, or that of the average Cambridge undergraduate. Nor was Rhees the sort of person who would rush to Wittgenstein's seminars right away. According to Ray Monk, 'he had, at first, been put off attending Wittgenstein's lectures by the mannerisms of his students', and only overcame his misgivings in February 1936, though he continued to attend all lectures of the academic session thereafter.[18] While this encounter with Wittgenstein marked the beginning, not just of a deep friendship, but of an intense philosophical conversation that would last until Wittgenstein's death in 1951, it was also rather short: in 1937, Rhees first returned to Manchester as Assistant Lecturer, then worked as a welder in a factory. Wittgenstein was delighted. On 5 April 1940, not long before Rhees took up a temporary post at Swansea, he wrote: 'I like the idea of your doing work in a factory. You'll get better & better I have no doubt, if you can stick.'[19] However, far from getting better at the job, Rhees soon found that welding was not his forte at all, and decided that he'd better leave the factory and do something else. After much internal agonizing, he finally explained the decision to Wittgenstein, on 30 December 1940:

> My welding kept on being bad, and I thought (not so stupidly either) that it probably would never develop into anything decent. . . . [S]uch training as I had had was in the academic and pedagogical line. (I was constantly aware that I was a duffer in a machine shop, and that this was partly because I hadn't had an apprenticeship there as a youngster.) It seemed then that I might be more useful if I were in some job in which the training I had got (?) might help. . . . And when Heath wrote offering me this deputy post here, I finally took it; though not right off the bat. [20]

Unfortunately, the appointment did not make Rhees's life more settled. He was now almost forty years old and still only a 'temporary assistant lecturer', the contract terminating in June 1941. In addition, he soon realized that '[the] business about my training making me fitted for this kind of job is plain rubbish', and even began to wonder whether he might not have given up the welding job too soon.[21] Fortunately for Swansea, Rhees did not return to welding, but his attitude towards academic work remained ambivalent even after A. E. Heath, the Foundation Professor of Philosophy at Swansea, had managed to secure him a permanent position in the Philosophy Department. As Phillips recalls, 'There were many occasions during his time at Swansea when Rhees worried over whether he should resign his post', and if he nevertheless stayed on, it was largely thanks to Wittgenstein's encouragement and support. These were badly needed. In October 1944, for instance, Rhees wrote: 'I don't seem to make much headway with my students; and here again it is my own confusion and uncertainty that cause much of the trouble', though it was also true that 'these students just don't read anything; certainly not the sort of things their parents read. They aren't interested in anything.'[22] Wittgenstein asked him not to despair, to pull himself together: 'Please go the bloody, rough way! Complain, swear, but go on. The students are stupid but they get something out of it'.[23] Besides, so he assured him later, his own students at Cambridge were not all that different: 'My class too is very primitive and often when I talk of "tribes" I think the most primitive tribe is right in front of me.'[24] Even so, Rhees's doubts persisted and became particularly acute in the summer of 1946, when he found himself on the brink of leaving Swansea. He would probably have done so, had Wittgenstein not urged him to think again:

> I was glad to hear that they had the sense to offer you an appointment again at Swansea. I wish to God you'ld take it!! I don't know, of course, what your special reasons are for wanting to leave Swansea, but please weigh them damn carefully. I should, for personal reasons, hate you to leave Swansea. Our talks & discussions have done me good. Don't stupidly throw away an opportunity of doing some good. Your derogatory remarks about your philosophical abilities & success are so much rubbish. You are all right. And I mean just that: nothing more & nothing less. – Philosophical influences much worse than yours & mine are spreading rapidly, & it's important that you should stay at your job. That your success won't be brilliant is certain; in fact it will be meagre, it's bound to be. Please, if you possibly can, resign yourself to it & stay on. – Don't misunderstand me. I'm not trying to appear wise. I'm just as silly as you are. But that doesn't make you any less silly.[25]

III

Wittgenstein's assurances that Rhees was 'all right', that he could 'do some good' if he remained in Swansea, and that there were 'philosophical influences much worse than yours & mine', did not miss their mark. Rhees stayed on and not only taught in Swansea until his retirement in 1966, but remained actively associated with the Philosophy Department until his death in 1989. Wittgenstein, who had first gone up to Swansea in 1942, would continue to visit Rhees there until 1947, no doubt also because he found the intellectual atmosphere at Swansea more congenial than the philosophical *milieu* at Cambridge. In his 1946 letter to Rhees, Wittgenstein does not elaborate on the philosophical influences he thought 'much worse than yours & mine', but we know from Karl Britton, one of his former students and then a philosophy lecturer at Swansea, that he repeatedly singled out *The Mind Association* and *The Aristotelian Society* for special criticism and that, when he learnt of Britton's invitation to the 1947 joint meeting in Cambridge, he felt nothing but contempt. 'Very well, to me it is just as if you had told me that there will be bubonic plague in Cambridge next summer. I am very glad to know and I shall make sure to be in London.'[26] Wittgenstein's annoyance had much to do with B. A. Farrell's recent, two-part discussion in *Mind* (1946) – 'An Appraisal of Therapeutic Positivism'[27] – in which the author refers to 'a certain method of dealing with and of resolving philosophical problems' that originated with Wittgenstein at Cambridge, but whose ramifications remained strangely elusive, because 'for the outsider there exists no official and adequate statement of the Wittgensteinian technique'.[28] It is not hard to see why Wittgenstein was infuriated. The suggestion that he had developed a 'technique', let alone one that could be described as 'therapeutic positivism', was just as absurd as the request for an 'official' statement of this 'technique'. While it was true that he would have rejected all talk of monads, immaterial thinking substances or metaphysical causation, for example, as confused and/or unilluminating, and applauded thinkers like Auguste Comte or Otto Neurath for exposing such pseudo-explanatory constructions, his conception of philosophical inquiry still remained much closer to the spirit of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Strawson's project of a '*descriptive* metaphysics', than it was to the postulates of 19th or 20th century positivism. Moreover, Wittgenstein was adamant that '[the] philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas',[29] and therefore neither a 'realist' nor an 'idealist' as traditionally understood, but a sensitive chronicler and skillful expounder of the subtle and complex ways in which language is tied up with a speaker's *Lebenswelt*. The care and stamina required for this task resembled the vigilance of a tightrope walker engaged in a delicate balancing act: what could one intelligibly *say* about reality, and how could one deepen the readers' understanding of it, too, without falling into a kind of grammatical void ? Not surprisingly, the most common misinterpretations of Wittgenstein's – and indeed the Swansea School's – writings rest on the assumption that the philosopher's thoughts must, in the final analysis, be rooted in a general 'position' and thus exemplify *some* philosophical 'ism' or other. Hence the feeling of exasperation among critics of the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy, not only in the 1940s, but in our own time. The occasions on which D. Z. Phillips, for example, has been asked whether he is a 'realist' or a 'non-realist' about belief in God, are legion, and yet the question continues to be asked with the same obstinacy with which critics persist in branding him a 'Wittgensteinian fideist'. As Phillips himself has observed:

> Talk of 'realism' and 'nonrealism', at least has to do with familiar misunderstandings of his [Wittgenstein's] work, whereas the label 'Wittgensteinian Fideism', making a recent comeback despite my textual refutations in *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (you can't keep a good label down), is simply a scandal in scholarship.[30]

It was in light of such responses, too, that Wittgenstein wondered whether the manuscript of *Philosophical Investigations* should even be published:

> Up to a short time ago I had really given up the idea of publishing my work in my lifetime. It used, indeed, to be revived from time to time: mainly because I was obliged to learn that my results (which I had communicated in lectures, typescripts and discussions), variously misunderstood, more or less mangled or watered down, were in circulation.[31]

Reflecting on the reasons for the widespread misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's writings, Rhees once commented: 'I think it is clear that he was asking for more than most readers would be able to give or to do',[32] an observation echoed in Winch's conviction that '[a] fairly small proportion would have read his work at all extensively or carefully'.[33] Even to such a formidable intellect as Rhees, the confrontation with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, posed a serious challenge. It did not seem to be the kind of work that could be understood without guidance from the author himself. Recalling the peculiar difficulty of the thoughts expressed in it, Rhees writes:

> Wittgenstein did go through the *Investigations* with me – some parts of it several times – before it was published. And although such understanding of it as I have has come more since his death, I should have understood less if I had not heard him read it and had him discuss it with me.[34]

While the idiom in which Wittgenstein's thoughts were presented was non-technical and free of jargon, it did not conform to standard philosophical writing, either. But then, so Rhees observes, '[We] cannot say, "It is a pity that Wittgenstein could not have presented his ideas in something more nearly the accepted philosophical style,"' since '*[that] would not have been a presentation of his philosophical views*.'[35] For Wittgenstein, *form* and *content* were just as inseparably connected as they were for a thinker like Nietzsche, who would similarly have scoffed at any attempt to reformulate his pregnant aphorisms as *propositions*, *scholia* or *lemmas* in the style of Spinoza's *Ethics,* or to present them in the form of a neat and tidy architectonic structure *à la* Kant or Hegel. Wittgenstein, too, experienced 'the accepted philosophical style' as a structural corset that could only distort the phenomena under investigation, and hence as something to be overcome – not artificially, with the aid of an abstract symbolism or a specially invented vocabulary, but by remaining firmly rooted in the language of everyday discourse. As Peter Winch has put it:

> I think it is clear that in the case of both (early) Plato and Wittgenstein, the relation between the literary presentation and the philosophical content is an 'internal' one. This is more marked in the case of Plato's elenchic dialogues, because of the *dramatic* aspect; different philosophical views as expressions of different forms of life.[36]

Closely connected with this observation is the recognition that the issues in question could not be properly appreciated without a serious *personal* struggle against the (natural) predilections of the intellect. And in this endeavor, so Wittgenstein assured Rhees, it certainly helped to have a serious discussion partner: 'It is true that the blind can't lead the blind; but two blind men have 4 feet between them & can therefore stabilize each other a bit.'[37]

IV

Realizing that the fruits of philosophical discourse depended more on the *personalities* of the interlocutors than on the extent of their *talent*, Rhees subsequently managed to assemble in Swansea a group of thinkers who satisfied both *desiderata* to an exemplary degree. In 1951, the year of Wittgenstein's death, Roy Holland was the first new appointee, closely followed by J. R. Jones and Peter Winch in 1952. At that time, İlham Dilman was still an undergraduate at Cambridge – he joined the Swansea philosophers ten years later, in 1961 – but not exactly ecstatic about his experience there:

> In Cambridge in my first two years as an undergraduate in the early 50s I was disappointed in philosophy as I found it. It was the time when philosophy in Britain was recovering from 'logical positivism' and was dominated by Oxford philosophers representing the 'linguistic' movement in philosophy.[38]

Dilman does not tell us why he thought the 'linguistic movement' philosophically disappointing, but he would certainly have disliked the sort of conceptual analysis that went on in one of J. L. Austin's (1911-1960) circles, and of which Geoffrey Warnock has given an almost rapturous account:

> We compared and contrasted such substantives as 'tool', 'instrument', 'implement', 'utensil', 'appliance', 'equipment', 'apparatus', 'gear', 'kit' – even 'device', and 'gimmick'. Here I remember Austin inviting us to classify *scissors*; kitchen scissors, I think we thought, were utensils, and garden shears were probably tools (or implements?), but the sort of scissors used in, for instance, dress-making were something of a problem. (Sewing 'materials' would probably *include* scissors, but that is not quite an answer to the question.) And I remember that he asked why, awaiting an operation, one would be disconcerted if the surgeon said, 'Right, I'll just go get my tools.' . . . I must confess . . . that I always found this sort of thing enormously enjoyable, exactly to my taste. I did not believe that it was likely to contribute to the solution of the problems of the post-war world; I did not believe that it would contribute, certainly or necessarily, to the solution of any problems in philosophy. But it was enormously enjoyable.[39]

Neither Dilman nor anyone else in the *Swansea School* would, I believe, have found the question whether garden shears should be subsumed under 'tools' or 'implements' at all important, let alone found the classificatory enterprise of which it formed a part, 'enormously enjoyable'. To thinkers like Rhees or Winch, the suggestion that philosophical issues might not be *serious*, would have sounded just as incongruous as the idea of a serious philosopher who was also a *frivolous* person. As Rhees says,

> . . . we should be surprised to find anyone who was a serious philosopher and was at the same time a playboy or man about town. . . . We may feel that there is something more like an internal connexion between what you are engaged on in philosophy, and the sort of life you lead.[40]

Rhees is, of course, not denying that there are publicly appointed academic philosophers who *do* lead the lives of 'playboys' or 'men about town', any more than he would deny the existence of highly paid philosophers who, though clever, are yet unable to speak with any depth about life, death, or human relationships. His point is a conceptual one, regarding the very *idea* of a philosopher and the kind of seriousness that is required in one who seeks to live up to it, though it would be a mistake to suppose that the seriousness in question could be captured in a simple formula. One illustration of it might be Wittgenstein's need to know where he stood with G. E. Moore, because it expressed an attitude towards life in which clarity about 'the way things really are' was of the utmost importance. In his diary entry of 7 October 1930, Wittgenstein describes the crucial moment:

> I asked Moore today whether he is glad when I come to see him regularly (as in the previous year) & said that I will not be offended whatever the answer turns out to be. He said that it wasn't clear to himself, & I said he should think it over & inform me; which he promised to do. I said I could not promise that his answer will not sadden me, yet, however, that it will not offend me. – And I believe it is God's will with me, that I shall hear & bear it.[41]

As Moore had promised, the answer to Wittgenstein's question was not long in coming. On 16 October 1930, the latter noted in his diary:

> Moore later answered my question to the effect that while he does not actually like me, my company nevertheless does him so much good that he thinks he should continue to keep it. That is a peculiar case.[42]

Wittgenstein's need to know what his presence meant to others was not motivated by a personal craving for applause, or the desire to raise his self-esteem, but sprang from a demand for honesty that claimed himself as well as others. This is why, for Wittgenstein, the truth about *Moore's* relation to *him* was merely part of the truth about the way things stood with him and other human beings. The correlate of his question to Moore was a question he had to ask himself, viz., what was his perception of his fellow men, and what did it reveal about *himself*? Wittgenstein was honest enough to raise it, and not only in his diary entry of 27 January 1937:

> I can observe on this journey a phenomenon that is uncommonly characteristic of me: Unless their appearance or demeanor makes a special impression on me, I judge people inferior to me: that is I would be inclined to use the word 'ordinary' about them, 'a man from the street' & the like. Perhaps I wouldn't say this but my first glance at them says it. There is already a judgement in this glance. A completely unfounded & unjustified judgement. And it would also be unjustified, of course, if upon closer acquaintance that person really proved to be very ordinary, that is superficial. I am of course in many ways extraordinary & therefore many people are ordinary compared to me; but in what does my extraordinariness consist?[43]

Apart from shedding further light on Winch's and Rhees's remarks about the relation between a thinker and the character of his thoughts, these quotations also reveal something about the character of the philosophical community whose work has been portrayed in this volume. The Swansea School was not merely a group of philosophers interested in Wittgenstein, but a unique and (fortuitous) constellation of personalities who, in spite of their (sometimes irreconcilable) disagreements over particular philosophical issues, nevertheless exhibited a surprising uniformity, not only in their views on the nature of moral judgements or the significance and intelligibility of religious belief, but in their appreciation of the personal demands required by a truly philosophical *Lebenseinstellung*. Their general ethical orientation, for instance, strongly gravitated towards the views of Plato and Kant, rather than to those of Aristotle or Mill, though it would still be misleading to speak of them as 'deontologists', say, partly because they would have rejected the dichotomy between a duty-based ethics and a consequentialist construal of the virtues as false, and partly because of the conviction that 'the appeals to false unities in ethics – the common good, human flourishing, universalizability, reflective equilibrium, acknowledgement of the other – are rooted in confused conceptions of language in moral judgements.'[44]

The Swansea School's attitude towards religion is rather more diffuse, and hence more difficult to describe. On the one hand, they certainly agreed that, as a fundamental human concern, religious belief and practice had to be taken seriously and could not simply be dismissed as irrational, superstitious, or nonsensical. On the other hand, their *personal* beliefs spanned the whole spectrum from atheism (Beardsmore) to orthodox Christianity (Mounce), with Rhees, Phillips and Winch probably coming closest to Wittgenstein's own views, i.e. deeply sympathetic to a religious outlook on life, sceptical of institutionalized religion, orthodox with respect to *some* aspects of the Western religious tradition (e.g., the concepts of sin, atonement and redemption, the nature of God), but also highly unorthodox in regard to others (e.g., the miraculous, the incarnation, the resurrection, immortality). In this connection, it is interesting to note that the work of Simone Weil (1909-1943), whom Rhees regarded as one of the most penetrating religious thinkers of the modern age, has exerted almost as strong an influence on the Swansea School's occupation with religion as Wittgenstein's own writings, even where their spiritual sensibilities were pulling them in quite different directions, as in the case of Howard Mounce, whose impressive knowledge – both *en gros* and *en détail* – of the history of philosophy deserves special mention. Indeed, reading through his latest work, *Metaphysics and the End of Philosophy* (Continuum, 2007), which charts the development – or rather: decline – of philosophy from Aristotle through the modern age, one is struck by the fact that the orthodoxy of Mounce's religious convictions goes hand in hand with an equally orthodox conception of philosophy as a *metaphysical* inquiry into the relation between the world and that which transcends it, albeit one whose primary inspiration would be Platonic rather than Kantian. From Mounce's sobering but, in my view, quite accurate, assessment of modern philosophy, Wittgenstein does not emerge as an unqualified *traditionalist* of the kind he would applaud, but he does exemplify for Mounce the reversal of an extended period of intellectual decline, and hence the hope that the end of philosophy may not be near just yet. That Mounce also mentions Simone Weil's philosophical endeavors in this connection again confirms the contention shared by all members of the Swansea School, viz., that, *qua* philosophers, their mission was not to propagate a particular world view or party-political programme, but to ensure that philosophical thinking does not fall into decline. As the eminent Wittgenstein scholar Peter Hacker has put it:

> The understanding that philosophy yields *can* be lost from one generation to another. Empirical knowledge can be bequeathed, but philosophical understanding has to be achieved anew by each generation. Those who believe that Wittgenstein contributed more to that form of understanding than any other person in the last century must surely strive to preserve his legacy, not only by endeavouring to elucidate his thought, but above all by *using it* to shed light on the

great problems of philosophy that bewilder our age and to eradicate the scientism that bedevils it.[45]

NOTES

[1] J.O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford, 1956), p. 164.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford, 1998), p. 24.

[4] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books* (Oxford, 1969), 2nd ed., p. 18.

[5] *Attention to Particulars* is also the title of a Festschrift for Rush Rhees, ed. by D. Z. Phillips and Peter Winch (London, 1989).

[6] *Culture and Value*, p. 42.

[7] 'On Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations*, 24:2 (April 2001), p. 147.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 148.

[10] Ibid., pp. 120-121.

[11] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe,* eds. Monika Seekircher, Brian McGuinness and Anton Unterkircher, (Charlottesville, 2004), 17984-17986.

[12] D. Z. Phillips, ed., *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. xi-xx.

[13] Lars Hertzberg, 'Rush Rhees on Philosophy and Religious Discourse', *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 2001), p. 431.

[14] 'On Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations*, 24:2 (April 2001), p. 152.

[15] D. Z. Phillips rightly describes *On Religion and Philosophy* as 'one of the most important collections of essays in twentieth century philosophy of religion. I do not think that there has been anything comparable of its kind since Kierkegaard.' (Unpublished typescript of the revised Introduction to the volume.)

[16] Rush Rhees, *Discussions of Simone Weil*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (New York, 1999).

[17] Cf. D. Z. Phillips's introduction to *Rush Rhees On Religion and Philosophy*, pp. xii-xvi.

[18] Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, (London, 1990), p. 357.

[19] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 18460-18462.

[20] Ibid., 18894-18904.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Letter from Rhees, 29.10.44, ibid., 19776-19780.

[23] Letter from Wittgenstein, 28.11.44, ibid., 19801-19809.

[24] Letter from Wittgenstein, 07.02.1946, in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents 1911-1951*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford, 2008), p. 395.

[25] Letter from Wittgenstein, 21.5.46, in *Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 20467-20470.

[26] Cf. Karl Britton's report, reprinted in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 39847-8.
[27] Ibid. The articles appeared in *Mind* LV, No. 217 (January 1946), pp. 25-48 and No. 218 (April 1946), pp. 133-150.
[28] *Mind*, No. 217, p. 125, reprinted in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 39847-8.
[29] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1981), 2nd ed., #455.
[30] *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 159. Readers who would like to familiarize themselves with the current state of the debate, including Phillips's responses to his critics, will find it profitable to read *Wittgensteinian Fideism*, eds. Kai Nielsen and D. Z. Phillips (London, 2005).
[31] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1958), 2nd ed., Preface, pp. 8-9.
[32] *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 153.
[33] Ibid., p. 180.
[34] Ibid., p. 153.
[35] Ibid., p. 155.
[36] Ibid., p. 184.
[37] Letter to Rhees, 17.10.1944, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Briefwechsel. Innsbrucker elektronische Ausgabe*, 19752.
[38] *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 116.
[39] G. J. Warnock, 'Sunday Mornings', in *Essays on J. L. Austin*, pp. 38-9. Quoted in Bryan Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher* (London, 1997), p. 67.
[40] Rush Rhees, 'The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy', *Philosophical Investigations* 17:4 (Oct 1994), p. 577.
[41] Wittgenstein's entry of 07.10.1930, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Public and Private Occasions*, eds. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann, trans. Alfred Nordmann (Lanham, 2003), p. 53.
[42] Ibid., p. 59.
[43] Ibid., p. 161.
[44] D. Z. Phillips, 'On Wittgenstein', in *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), Section VIII, p. 151.
[45] *Philosophical Investigations* 24:2 (April 2001), p. 130.

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